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PRACTICAL DISCOURSE
ON THE
MORAL USES AND OBLIGATIONS
OF THE
INSTITUTION
OF
BAPTISM;

DESIGNED

To assist a serious and judicious Obedience to it.

And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be Baptized, and
wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

The Acts.

L O N D O N :

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P R E F A C E.

THE Positive Institutions of our excellent Religion, (or the duties, which without the sanction of it's authority we should not be under any obligations to observe) are not only proofs of its superiority to other religious systems, but marks of its intrinsic beauty and worth. For as they are few; so they are very plain and simple, and their tendency is of the highest importance. The appointment of such duties is a condescension to the infirmities of our nature and condition: and they are suited, even by engaging these infirmities on the side of Religion, to instil the noblest sentiments of piety and goodness, and to cherish the best feelings and most generous affections of the soul. Being few and simple, and deriving all their obligation from the command of God, they are a security and guard against the rites of a gay or a gloomy superstition, and of a fruitful imagination: and being designed to represent the purity of the Christian Religion, or to furnish mementos of the mercy of God to sincere penitents; or, being expressive of our repentance, our virtuous resolutions, our gratitude and subjection to the Redeemer, the best teacher of righteousness.

ii P R E F A C E.

ousness and truth, they are in their own nature adapted to preserve and strengthen a supreme and prevailing attachment to, and a deep sense of, the excellency and importance of universal holiness. To illustrate, then, the moral and practical design of the Christian rites must appear to be a service highly useful in itself; a service, that tends to reflect honour and credit upon the Christian system, and is suited to promote the unity of Christians in the bond of holy love. It comes therefore powerfully recommended to the candid attention, and the cordial acceptance of all the sincere and rational disciples of Jesus Christ: On this account, waving in the general every thing of a controversial nature, I would consider *Christian Baptism* in a practical view. To promote its *practical uses* by explaining *them*, and by insisting on the *obligations* to observe this rite, is the great design of the ensuing discourse.

E R R A T A.

Page 4. line 3 from the bottom, for *deletious*, read idolatrous. P. 11. l. 20. before *it is*, read as. P. 17. l. 5. for *forthly*, read fourthly. P. 18. l. 10. from the bottom, for *decide*, read moderate. P. 24. l. 29. for *his*, read it's. P. 28. l. 5 from the bottom, for *upon*, read preceding it. P. 47. l. 12. after *speak*, add it. Id. l. 13. for *regret*, read reluctance.

CHAP.

C H A P. I.

The religious and moral uses of baptism.

AS to the *mode* of Christian Baptism, or the manner in which the rite is to be performed; it should ever be remembered, that charity among Christians is of infinitely greater moment in itself, more to the credit of the Christian faith, and more valuable in the sight of God than the most scrupulous attachment, and the most regular submission to modes and rites, that are supported even by the plain and indubitable marks of God's authority: for not only is our moral improvement (of which love is a most considerable branch) the great end of all circumstantial in religion; but God himself hath declared by the prophets and by Jesus Christ, that he will have mercy and not sacrifice, i. e. before and in preference to sacrifice; and the great rule of reason and revelation in this case is, "Let every man be persuaded in his own mind, and let not any one judge or set at nought his brother." But, as it may seem expedient, before we proceed in our subject, to premise something on the mode of this institution, I will briefly endeavour to ascertain what is the true and determinate idea contained under the word, *baptise*. Here I choose to express, and defend my own sentiments and practice, in the words of the ingenious and learned Mr. Hallet in his celebrated piece on *Circumcision and Baptism*.—"The primitive manner of baptising was (usually at least) *dipping, or plunging*, the person under water.

* Hallet's Notes and Discourses, vol. 3. p. 355.

B.

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“ This is now so universally acknowledged on all
 “ hands, that there is no occasion to say much on this
 “ head. It will be sufficient to observe, that the
 “ scriptures speak of persons *being buried in Baptism*,
 “ of having *their bodies* washed with *pure water*, and
 “ of Water Baptism as *putting away the filth of the*
 “ *flesh* : which expressions evidently allude to, and sup-
 “ pose, the *dipping* of the whole body, or the burying
 “ it under water. Accordingly the Christian church
 “ continued the practice of baptising by *immersion* (ex-
 “ cepting in a case of necessity) through all ages, and
 “ in all countries till of late. Nay, as far as I can
 “ find, it is still the practice of all the Christian
 “ churches in the world, excepting only the church of
 “ Rome, and those Protestant churches that came out
 “ of her.—The practice of *dipping* infants in Baptism
 “ was not left off here, in *England*, much above an
 “ hundred years ago.—Accordingly the old editions of
 “ the Common Prayers prescribed *only dipping*; and
 “ in the present edition *dipping* is still *required*; and
 “ *pouring water* on the child *only permitted* in case the
 “ *sureties* certify that the child is *weak*.” This is
 the testimony born to the practice of immersion, as
 scriptural, antient and universal, by a Pædobaptist
 skilled in critical learning, and conversant in ecclesiasti-
 cal history.*

Let

* “ We grant that baptism then was by *washing the whole body*,”
 says Mr. Baxter on *Matt. v. 3*. Agreeably to this sentiment he
 paraphrases *Rom. vi. 4*. “ Therefore in our baptism we are *dipped*
 “ under the water, as signifying our covenant profession, that as he
 “ was buried for sin, we are dead and buried to sin : that as the
 “ glorious power of God raised him from the dead, so we should
 “ rise up to live to him in newness and holiness of life.” See his
 paraphrase on the new Testament. These concessions, as to the
 mode of baptism, are very remarkable : as some of the most
 severe and bitter reflections dropt from the pen of that great and
 good

Let us now immediately proceed to the point, which we have principally in view in this discourse, namely, to illustrate the *moral, religious, and practical uses of Baptism*. This rite, it evidently appears, was appointed by our Christian lawgiver to be a distinct and solemn profession of his religion, and an acknowledgement of our belief in Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, the Prophet of the Most High, and the Saviour of sinners.—What less than an acknowledgement of His authority does the phrase, of being baptised into the name of another denote? The apostle says, that the *Israelites were baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea*. What is the meaning of this assertion, but that when they passed through the Red Sea, and were conducted in the wilderness by a cloud, they, in this whole matter, professed their embracing that religion which God had taught them by Moses? Thus when the apostle puts the question, “Were ye baptised in the name of Paul,” it is as much as if he had said, Have you received me as your Master? Have you professed a religion of mine? In the same manner they, who by the preaching of John the Baptist had been brought to repentance, and were baptised by him, are called the disciples of John. Thus also the converts to the belief and profession of the gospel were baptised in the name, or into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; i. e. they made a solemn profession of their believing the doctrines, and of their resolving to obey the precepts of that religion which God the Father Almighty revealed and taught by his Son Jesus Christ, and confirmed by the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost. And from good man on this very point, when he was heated by the warmth of controversy.—

a view of the history of Baptism in the New Testament it appears, that a profession of the divine authority of Christ as the prophet of God, and the redeemer of mankind, was it's primary design. * And *this single notion* of it is as truly and properly the essential and prin-

* Hence we are naturally led to enquire, Is there not a great and material difference between *Circumcision* and *Baptism* as to the intent of each rite? Did not the former refer to the engagement God entered into to be the God of Abraham's seed? Whereas the latter expresses the resolutions of *Christians*, and the obligations which *they* lay *themselves* under to act agreeable to the Christian principles and instructions. Was not the former a sign on *God's* part of his grace and favour? And is not the latter a sign on *man's* part, of his faith and penitence, because it is always affixed in the New Testament to believing and repenting? And if so, what argument of sufficient strength and force can be derived from the use of the former to the subjects of the latter? Since they, who are capable of a voluntary choice of Christianity, can *alone* be the proper subjects of a rite, which is the sign and token of a free choice and a *personal profession* of it; though God might with great propriety direct, that a sign and memorial of the merciful intentions and the gracious schemes of his providence should be administered to *infants* throughout every succeeding generation, to keep alive the faith and hope of his people, in his purpose and promise to preserve the interests of the true religion in the world.—I beg leave further to propose it to the attention of the candid and impartial, whether the design of circumcision is not misunderstood, when it is supposed to be the token of some peculiar privileges and blessings *granted to infants*. The promise, to which circumcision is annexed, as a sign of it, is this: *I will be a God, to thee and thy seed after thee*. The word *seed* generally if not always means, *posterity* without any particular respect to infants. The import of the promise is this, that God would continue and preserve a people in the world, out of Abraham's posterity, who should stand in a peculiar relation to him. Abraham was called from his father's house, and from his dolatrous neighbours to the knowledge and the service of the true God. It is an easy and natural supposition, that his mind would be possessed with some apprehensions and fears, lest his posterity should

principal end of Baptism ; as a commemoration of the death of Christ, is the essential and principal intent of the Lord's Supper. In considering the moral and religious uses of this Christian ordinance, I shall deduce them from this idea and view of its design ; and shall show, that they are connected with and arise out of this

should want the advantages and honour of such privileges. The covenant, of which circumcision was the sign, was suited, if not intended, to remove those fears. God engages to maintain the same relation to his posterity, or seed, through their generations, which he bore to him. If we suppose that circumcision gave children, or infants, a claim to a future, or eternal existence, or if it gave even *adults* such a claim ; as the uncircumcised were excluded from a participation of the benefits of which that rite was a token, it will be an exceeding difficult task to reconcile this dispensation to our natural notions of justice and goodness : since the want of this sign could be no matter of blame in infants, and in that great multitude who would never hear of this covenant. It would be still more difficult to reconcile it with that gracious promise made after the fall, which must be understood as extending to the *whole race*, viz. That the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent : Which denoted that victory should be obtained over the serpent ; and that the evils he had introduced should be redressed. Under this covenant are the whole human race born. All who suffered through the serpent, are entitled by this promise to the benefits of victory obtained over him, by the seed of the woman. Can we imagine that it is the design of the Abrahamic covenant to exclude any from the benefits of that covenant of grace, under the kind influence of which they are brought into existence, without their forfeiting these benefits by personal fault and guilt ?— In general as to the arguments drawn from the use of circumcision for our direction in the practice of baptism, may I be allowed to remark, that baptism and circumcision are two distinct rites appointed under different dispensations.—The nature of each must be therefore learnt from the distinct history of each. The scripture account and history of each, can be the only rule and guide for our judgment and practice : and from what Moses, Christ and his apostles said and did, from *that only*, can be learnt their agreement, or disagreement.

single notion of it, as a particular and solemn manner of submitting to the authority of Christ, and of professing our faith in him. And let us observe,

SECTION I.

First, the tendency of Baptism to promote an *enquiry into the evidences*, and to beget a *well-grounded persuasion* of the *excellency and the importance* of the Christian faith. That the Christian religion is true and divine, that it's discoveries are highly interesting and important, are points evidently previous to our belief and profession of the gospel; provided, that this belief is any thing more than a careless assent in compliance with established principles: or if this profession is any thing better than a mere conformity to external forms and received customs. To render our faith and profession explicit and personal, some manner of expressing our acknowledgement of Jesus Christ, as the Messiah, is very expedient: by which each one for himself declares his regard to the authority, and his expectation from the mercy of the Saviour. This is, as it were to set his name and seal to the records of the gospel.— And it has the same tendency and use, as signing of articles and covenants in civil cases, namely, that of strengthening the obligations, and of producing a rational and firm conviction of the truth and excellency of what he thus particularly, expressly, and solemnly consents to and approves. Who, without being chargeable with inexcusable carelessness, or an impious want of sincerity, can deliberately and publicly profess his faith in Christ by the rite of Baptism; unless he has, according to his ability and opportunities, considered the nature and the evidences of the Christian faith, before he submitted to that rite? For who, that pays the least attention to the meaning of the institution, but
must

must perceive the guilt of separating this external profession from the belief of the heart : and the folly of acknowledging the belief of the heart without attending to those evidences, which alone can justify and support that belief ? When men are called upon to make a publick and explicit profession of the Christian faith : when they are bound by a particular rite to own it, as divine, each for himself, separately and solemnly, by a rite which derives all it's authority from the appointment of God : when they are disposed to obey this institution, what is the natural, genuine, and evident tendency of this proceeding, but to lead men to pause, reflect, and consider what are the truths, they thereby profess ; what evidences there are for these truths ; and what interest and concern they themselves have in them ? Is not such an appointment suited to suggest, in an easy, forcible, and convincing manner, to their minds, the propriety, expediency, and necessity indeed, of enquiring into the reasons and foundations on which the truth of the gospel stands ? And is it not adapted to fix their desultory and wandering thoughts on the subject, and to gain their more serious and deliberate attention to it ? To these observations on the use of *any external rite* in this matter, we should add *the peculiar suitableness* of the rite appointed by the Christian lawgiver. Our being baptised in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, is not only fitted to suggest to the mind the propriety of examining the grounds of the Christian faith, but it affords *a clue* by which to assist and direct our consideration of the plan and of the evidences of the gospel. For as the first enquiry is naturally, what is the meaning and the import of being baptised into these names ? so the next step is an acquaintance with the several parts, which the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit transacted in
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the work of our redemption. This necessarily leads us into the knowledge of the amazing goodness of the God and Father of all in the mission of his Son ; of the unparalleled friendship of the Son, his great undertaking and his glorious character ; and of the miraculous works and endowments of the Holy Spirit, by which the divine authority and the heavenly mission of Jesus Christ were confirmed. And who does not perceive, that these enquiries, which the form of Baptism suggests, will produce a lively and rational conviction of the truth and excellency of the Christian faith ? It further deserves our attention that the rite itself is a *memorial and representation* of those two facts, which in their mutual connection evince the truth of Christ's mission, namely his *burial* and *resurrection*. It is therefore a most proper rite, by which to testify our faith in Christ ; as it holds forth, by an affecting emblem, the great object and confirmation of our faith, and directs our attention to the grand proof of his important and exalted character. For the death of Christ only proved his own sincerity ; whereas by his resurrection he was declared the Son of God with power. (b) These reasonings from the tendency of the rite

(b) This remark suggests to our notice the different nature and ends of the Lord's Supper and of the ordinance of baptism. The *latter* is the rite, by which we assume at first the Christian character ; the *former* is that, by which we profess our continued and persevering attachment to Christ. The *latter* has an immediate and direct reference to our sorrow for our past sins, and our resolutions for the future : the *former* has only a remote and distant respect to these acts of the mind. The *latter* is a memorial of the burial and resurrection of Christ : the *former* is the monument of his death. By the *latter* we profess our firm and cheerful persuasion of the truth and divinity of his character : by the *former* we recognize his love and friendship, and our obligations to him. The *latter* sup-

rite are quite consistent with the original institution and evangelical history of it's administration. From which it appears, that an acquaintance with the character and a conviction of the divine authority of Christ as the fruit of a serious enquiry into the nature, and a candid attention to the evidences of his claims, was previous to Baptism, and always required as a necessary qualification in those, who were willing to obey this institution. Thus our Lord gave his apostles a commission "to teach" all nations: or as St. Mark expresses, "to go into all the world and to preach the gospel to every creature:" Making instruction a necessary step to the being Baptized into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. In conformity to this commission we find the apostles constantly instructing their hearers in the nature and evidences of the Christian religion, as previous to their Baptism: that their profession of it might be the result of their conviction, and the matter of their serious and deliberate choice. Those messengers opened and confirmed the important character that their Lord sustained: when

supposes that before the time, on which we submitted to it, we had not by any one particular, solemn and explicit act professed our faith in Christ: the *former* implies, that we are already, before we surround the table, his avowed and devoted disciples. The *latter* resembles an oath of allegiance to a *new* sovereign: the *former* the future returning instances of homage and respect to that Sovereign. In a word, the latter is the only christian rite, which is spoke of in scripture, as the appointed token of our acknowledgement of Christ's character, and as the sign of our repentance. To express this is the primary, direct and principal design of it. And a grateful remembrance of the friendship of him, whom we have *already* owned for our Lord, is the primary and principal view of the other rite. Every one must determine for himself concerning the justness and propriety of this representation by an examination of the account and history, which the new Testament affords us of both rites.

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their hearers were convinced, then they were Baptized. This is evident from the history of the three thousand converts in *Acts* ii. from that of the Samaritans *Acts* viii. from that of the eunuch in the same chapter: from that of Cornelius and the jailor and their respective Households. (c) And it is recorded to the singular ho-

(c) " The account which of all others is most explicit in this case is that of the jailor, *Acts* xvi. And I desire no better clue than that whereby to find out the meaning of what is said concerning the other *households*. We are told in ver. 30, 31, 32. That the jailor, astonished at the extraordinary interposition of providence in favour of Paul and Silas, *brought them out and said, Sirs! what must I do to be saved; and that they said believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and thy house: and they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house*. Upon which I would ask the following questions, Whether the author of the Appendix is assured, that there were infants in that house: whether, if there were, the word of the Lord was spoken to those infants: and whether such speech could answer any purpose with regard to them? When therefore it is added, ver. 33. that he and all his were straightway baptized, the words can include no more, than that as many were baptized, as had the word of the Lord spoken to them; and these in ver. 34. we find were just so many and no more than believed in God. *When he had brought them into his house* (having as it should seem taken them to some out parts, adjacent to his house, where there was some collection of water fit for the purposes of baptizing) *he set meat before them and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house*. All his house, all his family, *believed in God*, as well as himself; being thereunto led by the interposition of providence in favour of the prisoners, and the *bearing the word of Christ from their mouths*. According to the account given of this household; even if there were infants in it: neither the speaking of the word of Christ, nor the baptizing can be understood concerning them; and all mention concerning them was with good reason omitted as needless, because the things mentioned relating to the household in general were known not to belong to them." See Burrough's defence of two discourses on positive institutions, p. 54, &c.

nour of the Bereans, “ that they were more noble “ than those in Thessalonica, because they searched the “ scriptures to see, whether those things, in which the “ apostles instructed them, were so;” and on this search, and the conviction that attended it, believed. It appears then from the institution and the history of the rite, that instruction in the Christian system, in it’s design and grounds, was always previous to the administration of it, that it might be a voluntary, free and rational act. It is further evident from a consideration of the tendency of the rite, that it is peculiarly suited to excite our enquiries into the reasonableness and excellency of our holy religion; to fix our attention on the proposals and evidences of the gospel; especially to direct our thoughts to the resurrection of Christ: and hereby it is calculated to render our profession of the gospel not the consequence of education and custom, but the fruit of deliberate and serious reflection and of rational conviction. This then is the first use of Christian Baptism, it is an acknowledgment of our faith in Christ; a use of no small moment, whether we consult the satisfaction of our own minds, the credit of our religion, or the improvement of Christians. We observe that

SECTION II

Secondly, Baptism expresses, exercises, and strengthens our *sincere repentance*. The very act, of acknowledging our religious regard to and expectations from Jesus Christ, denotes also the sentiments of our minds concerning the evil and danger of vicious principles and habits, and our ready acceptance of every method tending to redeem us from the power and penalties of sin. For what is the character under which Christ appeared, but that of the Saviour of sinners? What are the glad tidings of his gospel, but the promise

mise of forgiveness? What was the great end of his life and death, but to reconcile us to God, that our trespasses might not be imputed against us? And what is the real character and condition of the humane race, but that of sinners? How then can a profession of the truth and an acknowledgement of our acceptance of and subjection to the gospel, how can such a profession made by *us*, who have exposed ourselves to the consequences, as we have contracted the guilt, of sin in innumerable instances, how can a profession thus circumstanced be separated from those views of the gospel and from those considerations of the character of Christ, which are the peculiar objects of a penitent's attention, concern and hope? Who that avows, as by Baptism he implicitly does, his persuasion of the authority, and his expectation from the friendship of Christ, but must be supposed to declare thereby his dependance upon the *Priest* as well as his submission to the *King*? Since our Lord is invested not only with all power to reward the obedience of men, but with authority to bestow pardon and forgiveness on sincere penitents. Consequently the man, who has any just notions of the offices of Jesus Christ, by being Baptized in his name virtually expresses a pungent remorse under a sense of contracted guilt, and an earnest desire of being interested, upon the terms of the gospel, in it's plentiful redemption. So that this rite is as really and truly expressive of our repentance and turning from sin, as it is a personal profession of our faith in the authority and character of the Son of God, the saviour of sinners. This will appear with further evidence, if we consider the preaching of the apostles, the views they afford us of Baptism, and the advice they give to the awakened and convinced. How does St. Peter's exhortation run? *Repent: and be Baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.*

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Acts ii. 38. Under what view is St. Paul directed to consider Baptism, but as the appointed means of “washing away his sins,” *Ch.* xxii. 16. And what does that expression denote, but that Saul, in submitting to Christ’s ordinance of Baptism, should do it from a conviction of the evil of sin, from a sense of its guilt, and a desire of deliverance from it’s power? What did the apostles require of men, but to repent and be converted? And did not they hold forth Christ to the acceptance of their hearers, as that Minister of divine grace through whom they should receive the remission of sins? Thus St. Peter preached to Cornelius and his house; “*to him give all the prophets witness, that through his name, whosoever believed in him should receive the remission of sins.*” Thus St. Paul preached at Antioch, *Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins?* It would be endless to multiply instances, by which to confirm this view of Christ’s character. Consequently by whatever rite our Lord is acknowledged as the Minister of forgiveness; that rite must denote *his* penitence who submits to it.—But what is still more determinate, if possible, as to the point, is the significancy and propriety of the rite of Baptism to indicate by an external sign that inward disposition of repentance, which must accompany it. “*Antiently*” (says Arch Bishop Tillotson) “those who were baptized, put off their garments, which signified the putting off the body of sin: and were immersed, or buried in water, to represent their death to sin: and then did rise up again out of the water to signify their entrance upon a new life. And to this custom the apostle alludes, when he says, *Rom.* vi. 4. We are buried with him by Baptism unto death; that we should walk in newness of life.”—And this act, by it’s seriousness and solemnity, is also suited to cherish the sentiments and feelings of repent-

ance : it composes the mind to reflection and thought : it assists us in the review of a former course : it impresses the mind with a more affecting sense of the demerit of sin, by engaging it's attention to the manner of the gospel salvation : it brings into one view the various follies and sins of our past conduct : and thus fixes with more force and life the impressions of penitent remorse. In whatever light we consider the matter, Baptism must appear to be intimately connected with, and is calculated to cherish our sincere repentance.

SECTION III.

Thirdly, Baptism is an *additional inducement* to engage us to *walk in all newness of life* and in a perfect conformity to the precepts and the genius of the gospel. By professing the Christian Religion from the deliberate choice of our minds, we lay ourselves under the strongest obligations, the obligations of a serious, premeditated and solemn declaration, to conform ourselves to the principles of the christian faith : that is, we bind ourselves to obey the precepts of the gospel, and to imitate the life of Christ, and to renounce every affection and habit, which is inconsistent with the spirit of his religion and repugnant to the rules he has prescribed. Now, if it is a becoming, wise and rational part to bring ourselves under the strictest obligations to all the offices of piety and virtue ; if it is a fit thing, that we should bind ourselves hereto : it is equally reasonable, it is most highly expedient, to use every mean of giving greater force and energy to those resolutions, and to prefer that manner of expressing our good purposes and our deliberate profession, which is best suited to leave the strongest impressions of these things on the mind. To comply with an institution of this tendency is a point of pious prudence in ourselves, as an institution of this tendency bears a strong impress of the wisdom and

and goodness of our lawgiver. Such an institution is the ordinance of Baptism. The acknowledgement of our submission to the authority of Jesus Christ, by the use of this solemn rite, is evidently calculated to render our profession more sincere, our resolutions stronger, and to inspire the mind with a more deep and lively sense of those obligations it brings itself under. It leads men to reflection : produces a pause in life, and brings them *to a point*, as to their profession of the christian faith : it induces them to consider the nature and consequences of christian obedience, and to examine the obligations to a virtuous life. As it is one single, personal and explicit act, performed with seriousness and deliberation, it must be attended with a more powerfully virtuous influence and leave stronger impressions, than a repeated compliance with those forms and customs which have nothing appropriate, or personal in them. And then it affords one particular point in life, on which the thoughts may be more easily fixed, to which the memory may have recourse in future years, and the recollection of which may be of the highest advantage in the christian life. Shall I mention further the tendency which a becoming use of this rite has to produce a more reverential regard to, and a deeper conviction, consequently a more lively and lasting sense, of the authority of God. For a devout compliance with such an institution can proceed from no other principle, than from a regard to the divine authority ; and to have this thus solemnly and deliberately exercised, must cherish, strengthen and establish it to a considerable degree : and as this principle is of the highest moral nature and use, this improvement of it is in no small degree important ? Shall I mention the glorious and animating motive to a steady and persevering obedience, which will, with peculiar force, present itself to a serious mind at such a season : name-

ly, the assurance of Christ himself, “ that if we confess him before men, he also will confess us before his father and his holy angels : and give unto us a crown of life ? ” Shall I mention what a powerful motive and an additional obligation the deliberate, solemn, and personal profession of such a pure and holy religion as the gospel, must afford to every serious and ingenuous mind ?—Shall I mention, over and above these considerations, how excellently this Christian ceremony in itself is suited to answer these valuable purposes ? Water is an emblem of purity ; and the use of it in Baptism denotes the purity of the Christian faith. The immersion in water represents, with great significance and propriety, that renunciation of sin, which is in scripture called dying, or being mortified to it ; as the rising again out of it typifies and illustrates our restoration to the life of piety and virtue. This is strongly argued by the apostle. *Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death ? Therefore we are buried with him by Baptism unto death ; that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.* This passage suggests another observation, that the moral improvement, and the practical uses of our Lord’s resurrection are forcibly impressed upon the mind by the rite of Baptism, as it is a designed memorial and representation of that important fact : and by thus bringing to our minds *that event*, which was the reward of our Lord’s perfect obedience, and the grand evidence of his authority, it strengthens our sense of the excellency and necessity of obedience to his precepts. Let it be further observed that the indispensable connection betwixt the moral use and the benefit of Baptism is most plainly and strongly asserted by St. Peter : when he says, that *after the similitude of the ark in which Noah and his family were preserved, Baptism*
doth

doth now save us : not the putting away the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God.—

Proceed we to observe,

SECTION IV.

Forthly, That Baptism obliges us *to regard the sole authority* of our blessed Lord and Master in matters of religious faith and practice. With this particular view does the apostle direct the Corinthians to consider the nature and design of their profession at Baptism : when upon occasion of those divisions and animosities which subsisted amongst them, through their zealous attachment to different ministers and teachers of religion, one following Paul, another Apollos, and a third Cephas, he reproves them in this sharp and severe question : *were ye baptized into the name of Paul ?* 1 Cor. i. 13. intimating, nay expressing with great strength of argument, the nature and design of that profession which they made, and of those obligations under which they brought themselves at their Baptism : which, if they had duly and properly reflected upon them, would have effectually secured them against the influence of party names and contentions. This is the natural influence of Baptism. For if through the force of education, the prejudices of one age or place, or the bias of our connections in life, we have been engaged in the debates and interest of one party and sect, or in an uncharitable attachment to one minister or teacher, to the injury of another in his reputation and usefulness ; if this is the case, what can be of a greater service than those thoughts and reflections which this particular rite will naturally suggest ; a rite that is in itself expressive of our sole regard to the authority of Jesus Christ, as the alone head, lawgiver and judge in the Christian church. Because his command is the *sole* ground of obedience to it : and his character as the chief prophet of God, and

the only Lord of conscience and Saviour of sinners, the object of the faith, we profess by it. Has not the voluntary, serious and deliberate performance of such a rite; or, has not the after-recollection of such an act, an apt and striking tendency to draw the mind off from our different parties and divisions: to annihilate them as it were for a time, and to unite and fix our thoughts on Jesus Christ, his supreme claims to our obedience and his sole prerogative to dictate to our faith and practice? If we only allow ourselves time coolly to ask, into whose name we were baptized, whether into that of Christ *only*, or into that of any other teacher? Whether into the profession of his religion *only*, or into the faith of any other church or sect? Must it not have a mighty influence to preserve our attachment to Christ, undivided and uncorrupted? Certainly, if we were baptized into *his* name: *his* laws, and not those of any other teacher, however wise and good; *his* faith, and not the articles of any church or any society; *his* authority, and not the decrees and power of any man or any body of men should be considered and owned by us, as binding upon our consciences. In all religious parties and disputes, whatever may be the *fact*, the *tendency and use* of Christian Baptism, I am sure is, to unite Christians under their common head and Lord; to bring the mind to one determinate point; and to lead it to *that question*, which must decide all disputes, and compose all animosities; namely, whose authority, whose sentiments ought to be conclusive and binding in every religious case with *those* who were baptized into the name of Christ. Or have we, by any particular, explicit, appropriate and solemn rite in compliance with the divine injunctions, professed our subjection to and acknowledged the authority of any sect, church or party? And Baptism hath also in another respect a tendency to impress us with a lively conviction, of the sole
and

and absolute authority of our blessed Lord, as his authority is the only ground of our obedience in this instance : and He hath enacted this rite in consequence of the power with which he is invested, a power which demands a supreme regard and unlimited obedience from us, and by this voluntary and serious act we present this his power to our thoughts in its fullest force, and stamp upon our hearts a binding sense of it.—In the last place,

SECTION V.

Fifthly, Another use of Baptism is to *unite Christians*, by the bonds of *one common badge* and token of their profession and hopes. This use follows from what was observed under the former head. For if it is designed and calculated to bring all Christians to the profession of *one head, one Lord, and one standard of faith* ; it must be intended and suited to cement them together in one spirit of love and peace. If Christians would but open their minds to the influence of this rite, they must feel its uniting power, and under its influence their hearts would be soothed into tenderness and their bosoms expand with love. It's tendency in this respect must be peculiarly cogent and engaging ; when the rite is one, when the principle of obedience is one, when the intention of the mind is one : when from a regard to the same Lord, men perform the same act of respect and homage, with the same workings of sincere repentance, and with the same resolutions of walking in newness of life. This was the case in the first age : and therefore with peculiar propriety, the apostle beseeches the Ephesians to walk with all lowliness, and meekness, and long-sufferings ; forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, by this consideration, that there is one Baptism. In the present period we may not perhaps be
able

able to urge this motive with the full force of its original purport. But notwithstanding the different sentiments, which subsist among Christians concerning the use and nature of Baptism, it is still to be remembered that we all profess ourselves the disciples of Christ, *admitted*, if not by the same rite, yet under the view of being baptized into *one society* : all sincere Christians, and good men, form one body under the same head, Jesus Christ : and all upright and good persons make their profession of faith in Christ after the manner, which they severally apprehend, is the mind and will of their common Lord. For that is Baptism to every one, which every one from conscience and as the result of a serious and humble enquiry, judges to be so. So that we are bound by all the ties of Christian love to receive one another in the Lord. And it further deserves our particular attention, that harmony, love and peace constitute a most important and essential branch of that newness of life, in which Christians at their Baptism oblige themselves to walk. The character also of that Lord, whom by this rite we acknowledge as our Master and Saviour, and of this gospel which we thereby embrace, suggests powerful inducements to all the exercises of love and peace.—Our Lord is the prince of peace ; and his gospel breathes the spirit of meekness, unanimity, and love (*d*).

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(*d*) If what has been observed above on the nature and uses of Baptism is supported by the reason of the thing, and by the scripture account and history of it, is it not sufficient to decide the controversies which have been so violently agitated on this head ? May not the disputes on this subject be resolved into these few plain questions ? Is the representation, which has been now given of Baptism, scriptural and true ? Does the new Testament either by precept, or example authorize *any other* Baptism, *besides this* ? Does it afford its sanction to *two* different rites, performed on *different subjects*, with *different views*, as equally answering the nature and intent of Christian

THE IMPROVEMENT.

From this illustration of the moral and religious uses of Baptism we learn, with what dispositions to submit to this ordinance, and how to improve it. Would we comply with this command of being baptized into the name of Christ in a worthy and rational manner? And would we reap the benefit of a sincere and rational submission to it? Let us admit the word of exhortation. Your purpose, Sirs! is good: your views are good! It becomes us to fulfil all righteousness. Our own hearts must approve our well regulated and pious zeal: our Master will behold it with pleasure: and God will own and reward it. Only let your service be rational and deliberate, it will be useful! only let it produce its genuine fruits, it will be highly satisfactory and acceptable.—Examine, Sirs, the evidences of your holy faith; consider the important and glorious characters Christ sustains, as the great Teacher of righteousness, the Saviour of the world, the Lord of all, and the judge of the human race. Weigh the testimonials he produces; such as an holy life, a pure doctrine, a variety of miraculous works, the accomplishment of prophecies, his resurrection from the dead, the gifts of the spirit, and the success of his gospel in

Christian Baptism? In all the examples of and reasonings upon Baptism, which we meet with in the Christian code, does it not bear *only* that plain, determinate and uniform meaning, we have illustrated in the former sections? And if so, what authority, what arguments from analogy, can justify a practice under that name, about which the word of God is totally silent? which in its meaning and use is entirely different from and really opposite to the rite it speaks of as Christian Baptism? These questions appear to deserve the serious and candid attention of every friend to truth, and to the purity of Christ's institutions.

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the world. Learn to value the gospel and to prize most highly the word of your salvation. Let repentance and newness of life be your great business. Be no longer the servants of sin: but commence the servants of righteousness. Let your conversation be such as becomes the gospel.—Study your bible.—Take your faith from that; form your practice by it.—You are the disciples of Christ; adhere to him as your only teacher and Lord.—Above all things, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, be meek, be humble, be patient and forgiving; be full of candor, and full of love.

This is the duty, these the obligations of those who are baptized into the name of Jesus Christ. Make the observation of these things your study and care. Be firm to your purpose. Adorn your profession. You serve a good master. You are engaged in a good work.—Great and precious are the promises of the gospel to animate your obedience! Your Lord and Master holds forth a crown of glory: seize the immortal prize!—Great and glorious, immense and everlasting will be your reward. Amen.

CH A P. II.

On the benefits of Christian Baptism.

HAVING endeavoured to give a plain and rational view of the moral and religious *uses* of Christian Baptism: the *benefit* or advantage annexed to this ordinance by the appointment of God, is the next point which offers itself to our consideration. This is the *forgiveness of sin*: according to the exhortation given to Saul by Ananias, *Acts* xxii. 16. *Be baptized and wash away*

away thy sins, calling upon the name of the Lord. This view the apostle Peter gives us of Baptism; when he exhorts the converts at Pentecost to *repent and be baptized* in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. (e)

(e) " Give me leave to observe that such exhortations are not according to the tenor of the New Testament to be confined to outrageous persecutors, such as Saul in the text, or to those heinous sinners mentioned in that second chapter of the Acts, who had imbrued their hands in the blood of Christ. They properly belong to all those, in every age of the church, who have *sins to repent of*; and who, by the good providence of God come to the hearing of Christ's gospel. Nor is there any difference between the one and the other, excepting that some are greater sinners than others, according to the circumstances, with which their sins are more or less aggravated. If none but such as the murderers of Christ, or such great sinners as persecuted Saul, were to be baptized in the view of remission of sins: then the commission of our Lord to baptize those in every nation, who were made disciples, by being induced to embrace his gospel, would have been to very little purpose: and then likewise there would have been no force in that declaration of the apostle Paul, that dying unto sin, and walking in newness of life, are the very things designed to be represented in the action of Baptism: or else we must be reduced to the absurdity of affirming that the greatest part of those who are made acquainted with the gospel, stand in no need of the mercy of it, for the pardon of their sins. It was indeed very fitting, both with regard to the murderers of Christ, and to such persons as persecuting Saul, that particular mention should be made to them of *the repentance* expected from them, and of the joyful views of remission, which Baptism contains, not excluding the greatest sinners. But if the institution of Baptism did not according to the mind of Christ, contain in itself this joyful view of remission; it could not have been applied to these extraordinary sinners, any more than to such as have sinned in a lower degree. But we find in many places in the New Testament, that as reformation of heart and life is expected from those, who are baptized in obedience to Christ's institution; so the hope of remission is designed to go along with the ordinance of Baptism, in all who faithfully submit to it."—See Burrough's two discourses on positive institutions, p. 36, 37.

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In conformity to this representation of the intent of Baptism, in allusion to it St. Paul speaks of the Corinthians *as washed*, 1 Cor. vi. 11.—We are not to suppose that *the mere external* action, separate from its moral design, and the good dispositions of the heart, can answer any such important purpose: for this would be to reflect upon the character of our Lord? and to represent him as more pleased with rites and ceremonies, than with the substantial and immutable excellent virtues of a good life and sincere heart. But the remission of sins must be considered as connected with Baptism on account of its tendency to cherish, and on the supposition of its proceeding from the sincere and unfeigned repentance of the heart and the cordial acceptance of the gospel. Accordingly Ananias joins it with *calling on the name of the Lord*, or a devout and affectionate acknowledgement of his character: and St. Peter, by the manner of his exhortation, affords us the same just sentiments of his purifying or absolving nature, inasmuch as he joins repentance with it, as necessary to this effect of Baptism. I would illustrate the point in the words of a good practical writer on the subject. “ When I say Baptism is for the forgiveness of sin, I do not suppose any thing like a charm in it: “ but the plain, rational notion of it may be illustrated “ thus. Suppose you have been guilty of rebellion, “ and your prince in great goodness is pleased to promise a pardon, on condition you manifest a sorrow “ for your crime, and give it under your hand and “ seal that you renounce it, and will behave for the “ future becoming a dutiful subject.—Here it is evident, your pardon is annexed to the signing and “ sealing this covenant. Now as Baptism is appointed “ of God for the remission of sins; I take it to be “ much of the same nature and significance as setting “ our hand and seal.—So that there is nothing in the
“ matter,

“ matter, but what is very intelligible and plain.—
 “ And like as your prince would not forgive your re-
 “ bellion, but conceive a just indignation against you,
 “ if he could know your heart did not agree with these
 “ outward signs : so God, who searcheth the heart,
 “ will account our Baptism nothing, and not annex
 “ to it the forgiveness of sins ; if it be not accompa-
 “ nied with the answer or stipulation of a good con-
 “ science towards God. Agreeably to the words of
 “ St. Peter, *Baptism doth now save us, not the putting*
 “ *away the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good*
 “ *conscience towards God**.”—In this view it appears ra-
 tional, interesting and useful : and must greatly con-
 duce to promote that goodness, which is the moral de-
 sign of this institution and of all externals in reli-
 gion. For only consider what Baptism does really sig-
 nify, and what is essential to the nature of it, namely,
 a sincere profession of faith in Christ the saviour of
 sinners and the great Minister of forgiveness ? Only
 attend to the moral and religious uses of it, which are
 necessary to render it acceptable to God, to wit,
 its being expressive of our unfeigned repentance, and
 our holy resolutions : and on its tendency, by the af-
 fecting and solemn circumstances of its administra-
 tion, to fill the heart with sorrow for our iniquities,
 and to inforce upon our consciences by additional mo-
 tives a conversation becoming the gospel. Only attend
 to this, and what can be more expedient and rational
 than to annex the forgiveness of sins to a rite, which
 at once expresses and establishes those dispositions,
 without which God can not, in consistency with his
 perfections, forgive us, and which in themselves and
 especially upon the plan of the gospel give us a claim
 to his pardoning mercy ? If any external rite performed

* See Foote's practical discourse concerning Baptism, P. xiii.

with seriousness and deliberation and from choice is highly proper to excite and improve the affections and purposes of virtuous penitents; to enforce the observance of this rite, by annexing some peculiar privilege and benefit to it in conjunction with faith and repentance must be likewise expedient. And what benefit so suited to the occasion, as the pardon of sin? For thus by making it the means of our pardon; it more strongly promotes its influence as the means of our reformation and virtue. It conduces mightily to bring us to a point in religion, and to cure that dilatory conduct, that listlessness and indifference, in which mankind are so apt to satisfy themselves, without bringing home to their hearts the great truths of the gospel, and duly reflecting upon their interest in them.—This appointment exhibits a most animating and encouraging view of the mercy and placability of God, and thereby tends to raise the workings of virtuous remorse in our bosoms, to engage and to enliven the good purpose, to support the mind and to invigorate the holy resolutions.—It holds forth in a lively manner the character of Jesus Christ and the wisdom of the evangelical plan; since that action, by which, with choice and deliberation, we seriously and explicitly profess our acceptance of the gospel and our sincere faith in Christ, is made the means of enjoying our pardon; and with the utmost propriety, as *this way* of dispensing the forgiveness of sins which are past, fixes our contemplation and thoughts on Jesus Christ as our propitiation, and on the gospel as the religion of sinners, and so corresponds to both: and thus it is suited to preserve that grand idea of the Christian Religion, as a gracious scheme, flowing from the essential mercy of God, and formed by his wisdom, for the recovery of mankind.—And since sincere faith and unfeigned repentance are absolutely necessary to render

der our baptismal profession of any value in the sight of God, this appointment cannot be justly considered, as in the least degree lessening the obligations of religion and virtue; or as countenancing a superstitious regard to ceremonies, in opposition to, or separate from the great and important matters of the law and gospel. —Especially when it is further attended to, that this forgiveness relates only to the sins *which are past*: and those works which our faith and repentance produce, will be the rule of finally determining our everlasting state at the bar of God.

I cannot conclude this chapter, without observing what unspeakable consolation and peace the due performance of this rite of Baptism will yield to those who are desirous to secure, and are sensible of the value of the great privilege, and the gracious blessing annexed to it! Forgiveness of sins! What enlivening accents! What an animating sound! To be introduced into a state of favour and friendship with God, happy state! desirable portion! “Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven: and whose sins are covered! Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin!” To be able to fix upon one certain and determinate period in our life, at which we may consider ourselves as having, by the declarations of God’s word, received the forgiveness of our past and forsaken sins; at the present instance, and in any future recollection, how must it rejoice and gladden the heart! Reconciliation and acceptance with God are the most valuable blessings! To date with good reason our right and our interest in these blessings from any particular time, must it not, does it not open the sources of joy, and pour into the bosom the delightful feelings of rest, satisfaction and peace?—Repent then and be baptized every

every one of you in the name of Christ Jesus for the remission of sins. This leads me to open,

CH A P. III.

The obligations to Christian Baptism.

THE obligations we lie under to obey this institution of our religion, and the considerations, which enforce a submission to it. And it comes recommended to our attention and regard; as,

SECTION I.

First, It is *expressly required* of us, that we should be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ: and the institution of this rite was attended with some *circumstances, peculiarly authoritative and binding*. You know that it was the last command, which our Lord issued out, whilst he resided on earth for the direction of his apostles in their future ministry, that they should go and teach all *nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father of the Son and of the Holy Ghost*. You know, that the apostles in their different ministrations insisted upon a submission to this ordinance as the duty and the privilege of *all*, who were converted to the Christian Faith. You are not unacquainted with the various instances of their regard to the order of their risen Lord. You cannot be ignorant of the practice of the apostles; even with respect to those that were, previously to their conversion, eminent for their moral endowments, and who immediately upon it were distinguished with the miraculous gifts of the Spirit; circumstances, which, if any thing could, one might be apt to suppose, would supercede and excuse a submission to it. This was the case of Cornelius and his household. And can you

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overlook those particular circumstances attending the original institution, which give it great weight and force? Our Lord directed his apostles to baptize all converts to his faith *at a time*, when he had received the most illustrious confirmation of the truth of his mission, by his resurrection from the dead. Nay, he introduces his command by founding it on the most solid and indisputable grounds, grounds sufficient both to justify his appointment of it and to claim our obedience, by asserting his universal authority, and by opening the nature of his grand and important character, as having all power given him in heaven and earth. Thus exalted and invested with universal dominion, our Lord appointed his ordinance of Baptism. And does not every circumstance of the institution, not only strongly intimate, but clearly prove the perpetual obligation of this command? Is it not still a duty, which we owe to mankind and our master, to teach, or by instruction to disciple all nations? Is it not still a duty to confess Christ with reverence, sincerity, and affection before men? What then forbids that *manner* of acknowledging Christ, and that *mark* of discipleship in the *present times*, which was so expressly commanded and so well suited for this purpose in the *first* ages of Christianity? Is not Baptism, in its original design and its practical uses, equally expedient and useful now, as it was then? And what is there in the institution, that limits and restrains the rite to the first converts? If, upon attending to the nature, the design, and the moral influence of the rite, we cannot but conclude its perpetuity; can our submission to it be a mere matter of *choice*, in any other sense than as every duty of a rational creature is so? Our Lord has plainly determined the matter by his sacred authority, leaving this ordinance in charge to all his followers. He has not limited, or restrained it; and upon what grounds can we do it? It extends to all,

who are so informed of the nature and reasons of his claims, as to engage them on conviction to become his disciples.—It is a command enacted in a manner, that impresses it with peculiar solemnity and weight. It was delivered by our Lord, when he had received the fullest demonstration of his divine and illustrious character, as the Son of God; delivered by him, as the Lord of all. Should not these circumstances both convince our minds of the propriety and reasonableness of this institution, and engage our obedience to it? Methinks, the name of the risen Saviour and the exalted Son of God should carry along with it an authority too great to be neglected, or trifled with! Methinks, his name should be too forcible and constraining to be withstood, when we reflect that in this exalted character he acts for the benefit of his church; and that his commands are not the ostentatious displays of power, but the injunctions of wisdom and goodness? The Saviour and the Prince are characters, that at once win upon the affections, and gain the submission of the heart! And how can we reconcile a disobedience to this command, with that reverence and love, which are due, and which, in other instances, we profess to pay, to his authority and grace?

To advance one step further in this argument: let it be observed, that they who withstand the injunctions of Christ, despise not man, but God.—And how can we reconcile a neglect of the command, by which we should testify our acknowledgement of his divine character, with the real belief of his heavenly Mission? If he is the Son of God; if he has required it of us, by being baptized into his name, to confess that he sustains this great character; and if we continue in the omission of this useful rite, what seems to be the plain and natural consequence; but, that either we are not satisfied
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of the truth of his claims, or that we can allow ourselves to trifle with his plain and express command?—But to repeat the sentiment again, do we consider, that in this case we despise not man, but God?—whose Son and Prophet is Jesus, and from whom our Lord hath received all his authority? If we could not trace out the wisdom and propriety of this injunction in any other respect, than as a testimony of our obedience to God, certainly in this view it claims our regard and submission. Permit me to propose a few plain questions, by which we may with clearness and certainty determine the point, and form a proper judgement of our conduct. Is not the great God our wise and gracious governor, whose power, wisdom, and goodness claim our unlimited obedience? Can we, without guilt, trifle with, despise, or neglect any laws which are stamped with his authority? Do not matters in different in themselves cease to be so, do they not become sacred and binding, when enjoined by him? If we believe then, that Christ has enacted any rite in the name of God, and invested with his supreme authority, how can we reconcile a neglect of it with any principles of piety, or of reason? Judge then, whether, whilst you believe that the commands of Christ are supported by the authority of God, your disobedience can be justified? Judge, whether, in violating such obligations to any positive law, you do not in that instance act inconsistent with your profession, and in opposition to the dictates of reason and of natural religion? To proceed,

SECTION II.

Secondly, Our *Lord's example* powerfully recommends and enforces our obedience to this institution. That part of our Lord's conduct, I refer to, is recorded, *Matt. iii. 13. &c. Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John to be baptized of him: but John forbade*

forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness: then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straitway out of the water: and lo! a voice from heaven saying, this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.—This history of our Lord's submission to the Baptism of John supplies us with a variety of observations, by which to illustrate the reasonableness of obeying the law of the same kind under the Christian dispensation. Can it be supposed, that it is not without a particular meaning and emphasis, that the evangelical historian has informed us of Christ's journey from Galilee to Jordan to be baptized of John? Does not this circumstance evince the fervor of our Lord's devotion and his active zeal in obeying every signification of the divine will? “ This journey (as a sensible writer observes) might and “ would have been spared, if the Son of God had not “ resolved to show the greatest respect to the command “ of his heavenly Father in the commission given to “ John to baptize. Instead of Jesus's travelling to be “ baptized of John, it might easily have been so ordered that John, who shortly after this baptized in “ Enon near to Salim, and in other parts near to Galilee, should go into Galilee and be directed to find “ out Jesus there, by the same spirit, which afterwards “ assured him this was the person, when Jesus of his “ own accord came unto him. But the meek and lowly Jesus, being yet a private person, and not having “ begun his ministry, nor taken upon him his publick “ character, though he knew his own superior dignity, “ yet acted consistently with himself, and gave an instance of that piety and reverence toward God, “ which shined forth in all the other parts of his life, “ by undergoing the fatigue of a journey on purpose

“ to

“ to do the greater honour to a divine institution.”*
 And what do we learn from hence: but to pay the highest respect to every known declaration of the divine will, the folly of those pleas for neglecting any of the divine commands, which men are so apt to draw from their convenience and ease, and to regard the laws of God though at the expence of some difficulty and trouble? We are further told that John, conscious of the inferiority of his own, and the distinguishing and superior excellency of our Lord’s character, with humility declined to perform the office of Baptism. But how does our Lord treat his modest apology? It does not alter his design. Jesus answering said unto him, *suffer it to be so now; for thus it becomes us to fulfil all righteousness.*—Our Lord was not easily diverted from his pious purpose, having, upon rational grounds, formed the design of submitting to the Baptism of John; but steadily persevered in it.—When we have such an example before us, can we justify to our own hearts a neglect of the divine law, in any instance of a positive nature, by pleading the superiority of our attainments in wisdom and goodness, so as to be raised above the help and assistance our knowledge, or our purposes might receive from an external rite? or in sober reason, can any apology of this nature be deemed sufficient, until we can make a claim to degrees of wisdom and goodness surpassing those the Son of God possessed? Nay, if it were possible to excel the Son of God in these attainments, it would not annul our obligations to obey a positive command of God: the principle, by which our Lord defended his own practice, being uncontroversible, immutable and universal. For it becomes *men*: it becomes *angels*, that exalted rank of

* See Burrough’s two discourses on positive institutions, p. 2, 3.
 —And defence, p. 19. &c.

beings;

beings; it became the *Son of God*; and if any spirits superior to him could exist, it would become *them*, as the creatures and the subjects of the Father of all spirits, *to fulfil all righteousness*. Obedience to rituals supported by clear marks of the divine authority, is incumbent on the most elevated beings to complete their moral character: it is necessary to maintain a becoming respect to the authority of God; necessary, as an example, to instruct and influence others; and highly necessary to preserve the divine laws from contempt and slight, in any one instance, which by too easy a transition would devolve on all the rest. And if this reasoning was solid enough in the judgement of the wisdom of God (for it is implied in his words) to determine *him* to pay this regard even to a ritual institution; with how much greater force does it bind *us*? If Jesus Christ, though surpassing men and angels in his original perfections and glory, though he was that divine person, who was in the form of God, and in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead; though he was sent into our world upon the most illustrious errand, and to sustain the most exalted character, that of the Saviour, Lord, and Judge of the human race; though John was only his forerunner and herald, and was a person of a character in every respect much inferior to his: if, notwithstanding these claims to superior excellency and dignity, *our Lord* thought it incumbent on him to acknowledge the Mission, and to pay that instance of homage and respect to the office of John, and the institution of God; by what plea can *we*, who are so greatly beneath the Son of God, and who are infinitely indebted to his friendship and the fruits of his heavenly mission, by what apology can *we* excuse to *ourselves* (not to say to God) our neglect to give that deliberate, voluntary, and explicit proof of our respect and

and homage to *his* character and office, which is so clearly required of us?

This passage further justifies us, in remarking the peculiar acceptableness of such acts of religious obedience to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. When our Lord *came up out of the water, the heavens were opened, the spirit of God descended upon him, and a voice from heaven was heard, proclaiming him the beloved Son of God, in whom he was well pleased!* Signal testimonials these to the character and office of Jesus Christ! And this witness from heaven was afforded at such a season: without laying an undue stress upon this circumstance, what can be concluded from it, but that this season, not only on other accounts, but as it gave a particular proof of our master's respect to the divine appointment and to the messenger of God, and was therefore expressive of that strong sense of the divine and moral obligations which possessed his bosom, was chosen to testify the acceptableness of his piety; to reflect, by the peculiar and glorious manifestations of the divine approbation, distinguishing honour and lustre upon the moral and religious character of our Lord; and to evince, that the Father Almighty beholds with pleasure and delight such instances of devout obedience to his institutions? On the whole, judge, whether this history of our Lord's conduct does not abound with instructions on the head of positive institutions? Judge whether it does not suggest a variety of hints to illustrate the fitness, expediency and reasonableness of obedience to ritual laws, and to answer all that our ease, or interest, or superior attainments in piety and virtue can plead against it? Here behold our divine master exhibiting a pattern of respect and honour to a ritual appointment suited, by the circumstances of it, to imprint on the mind a strong sense of the

the divine authority in these instances and to excite the ardour of a diligent and active piety! Can we dispute the principles of our Lord's conduct, or evade the force of his example? What remains then: but, that we go and do likewise? To proceed,

SECTION III.

Thirdly, The *pleasure* our obedience to this institution will afford, should invite, and the *advantages* that will arise from it should engage our ready and chearful submission.—Baptism is powerfully enforced by the command of God, and strongly recommended by the example of Christ; but its obligations are more interesting and engaging, as our own improvement and satisfaction result from it. Who can seriously, and with judgement, submit to this law; without feeling his faith confirmed, his hope animated and his resolutions strengthened? How favourable to our holy purposes and how highly beneficial, that solemn pause it produces in life! Your enquiries into the character of Christ, and the evidences of his heavenly mission, your review of your conduct, the workings of virtuous remorse, and the fervent addresses of an humble, penitent and grateful heart, these previous circumstances will fix in the mind the best and most useful sentiments of piety and virtue, and will give strength and establishment to every grace. Baptism contributes to make us rational, judicious, firm, holy, benevolent and consistent Christians. Is not this a character worthy of our esteem, desire, and pursuit? And what can more strongly evince the advantages of this ordinance, than its *tendency* to form a character so amiable, perfect and noble? And the more inexcusable will be our neglect, if, when interest conspires with gratitude towards God and the Redeemer, we are not persuaded to arise and be baptized, calling on the name of the Lord! If it is

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any advantage to have our faith built on rational and solid principles ; if it is any advantage to have our profession explicit, serious and solemn ; if any profit can be derived from a deliberate act of sincere and ingenuous repentance ; if any benefit arises from binding ourselves in a publick and devout manner to die unto sin, to walk in newness of life, and to adorn the Christian profession ; if it is any advantage to use every mean of enlarging our hearts and sweetning our temper with love and good will ; and if any good results from our being attached to the sole authority of Jesus Christ by strong exclusive ties ; if these advantages can be more effectually attained by the serious and judicious use of Christian Baptism ; and if they do arise from it, both in the nature of things and in the tendency of the rite, why should we cast from us the benefits which Christ has designed for us ? Need I mention, that the great advantages and the moral benefits of this rite will be *renewed* by the remembrance of the important scene. At every recollection the penitent heart will bleed again ; and again will the rich consolations of the gospel pour into it their healing balm ; our good resolutions will be reviewed, and will again strengthen and exalt our faith : the glorious hope of being confessed by Christ will again animate our obedience : the strong ties of Baptism will again bind our souls with fresh force, and with stronger vigor will engage our constant adherence and more perfect conformity to the gospel. Methinks the Christian, who really believes the gospel, reveres his Saviour, and desires his own improvement in what will purify and exalt his nature, cannot slight and will not delay obedience to that, which is not only his duty, but his privilege ; and which he cannot neglect without incurring the charge of disobedience to his master, and of indifference and inattention to his own true benefit. But, besides depriving himself by his

omission of the moral advantages arising from this duty: he will likewise lose the *pleasure and satisfaction*, an obedience to this ordinance will yield. For *pleasure* it certainly will yield, to reflect that we have done our duty; that we have fulfilled all righteousness; have testified our respect to the character, and our homage to the authority of Christ; have put in our humble claims for the remission of sins; and have bound ourselves by the most forcible ties to a conduct rational, delightful, and useful. Pleasure it certainly will yield, to consider ourselves as by Baptism connected with the household of faith, and a member of the universal community of good Christians; that we have put ourselves under the guidance and protection of him, who is the wisdom and the power of God; and that we are, by our own serious and deliberate choice and profession, the friends of the most worthy person, that ever adorned humanity by his great and good life, and the disciples of "the first born of every creature"! A pleasure certainly it will yield to think, that we have sought the honour and happiness of so glorious a relation by the rite he has appointed, and in the manner which he has recommended by his own example! A divine and rational pleasure, an useful gratification certainly it will afford, thus to reflect upon the important and interesting scenes and blessings, which our Christian Baptism holds to the view of every penitent believer. Who, in one of the most serious and solemn moments of his life can behold, with a temper suited to receive the correspondent impressions, who *can then behold* the lively memorials and submit to a rite which is the affecting monument of a risen Saviour, a reconciled and propitious God, a full pardon of past sins, and the applause of the descending judge, without the emotions of joy and triumph?—And who can *afterwards review* this act of humble and grateful obedience without feeling new sensations of delight?

light? Who can trace the influence of it in his future temper and conduct without approving, without rejoicing in what he has done? I trust the happy experience of many before whom I now speak, can testify these are not the pleasing dreams of a warm imagination: but the solid joys of reason and the pure satisfactions of an enlightened conscience and an obedient heart! Come then, and share in these rich entertainments of the gospel! Dismiss your fears! Reject your doubts: thus profess your faith in Christ: thus take his yoke upon you: it will give you rest, it will inspire the heart with comfort and peace! Be no longer, sirs! indifferent to your own improvement and satisfaction! your edification and your joy should carry inducements sufficient, in the mention of them, to engage your obedience and excite your pursuit! Far be it then from the design of your hearts any longer to wrong your own souls, as well as to affront the authority and goodness of your Lord! Once more,

SECTION IV.

Fourthly and lastly, The *honour* of our master and the *success* of his religion in the world should be a prevailing, as it is a strong inducement, to the observation of this rite. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the standing memorials of those interesting and important facts, on which the Christian Faith is founded. Their first use and introduction evince the reality and truth of those facts; as much as national and publick festivals of commemoration ascertain the reality of the events, the memory of which they are intended to preserve: and the continued observation of them affords through succeeding, a constant monument of the faith and hope of preceeding generations: and so they maintain alive a sense and memory of those historical facts, from which we may conclude the divine origin of our religion. In

this light, an observance of them is a point of *public moment*, a point in which the truth and credibility of the gospel are concerned. And if we are convinced that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, is it not our duty, is it not the duty of each for himself as well as of others, to join in receiving and obeying these perpetual testimonies to the truth of the gospel and the credibility of our faith? To slight and neglect these rites carries too much *the appearance* of a virtual denial of the facts they commemorate; and it is to do our part towards erasing their memory out of the minds of men, and towards destroying the monuments of them in the world. Though thanks be to God! His faith will maintain it's ground, notwithstanding the weakness of our efforts to support it! His gospel will exist and prevail, notwithstanding that we forbear to afford our testimony to it's truth! Yet the consequence of this negligence and folly will rest on *our own* heads!

Thus to slight the institutions of Christ betrays in some degree an indifference and inattention to the success and influence of the gospel; it is by our own example to discountenance the regard and reverence, that others may be disposed to express for his appointments; it gives a sanction to the conduct of an ungrateful generation, who neglect the distinguishing badge of their profession and the gracious memorial of their dying Lord; and, if the evil influence of our example reach no further, it will particularly affect our children, domesticks, and immediate dependents; it will reconcile them to the omission of a duty, which they would be otherwise zealous to discharge: and through them the influence of it will descend down to succeeding generations. To this subjoin the charge of the inconsistency it brings upon ourselves, that whilst we are known to believe the divine authority and original of this rite,

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we are found to continue in a practical neglect of it? And in what light must this behaviour be considered by others, who acquainted with our inward sentiments and observing our outward conduct behold the contrariety and opposition between them; a contrariety and opposition, that certainly reflect no honour upon ourselves, or our master? Now, is it a slight matter thus to trifle with the credit and honour of our Lord and his religion? Does such a carelessness and indifference about the success of the gospel, the reception of Christ's institutions, and the influence of his laws comport with our reverence for our Lord and our trust in his mercy? And what will others think, when they see how easily the disciples of Christ dispense with his laws and satisfy their minds in the neglect of them? Surely the reverse of this should be your conduct. You should generously bear your testimony to the credibility of the gospel, and the truth of your faith: you should, by your serious and solemn obedience, at once preserve the memorials of the important facts of the Christian Religion; and excite a reverence and regard in others for the institutions of your master. You should by your own ready submission shame others, if possible, out of their neglect. You should, by going before in this part of your Christian duty, animate their zeal and do something towards diffusing a general emulation, who shall most readily and chearfully testify their cordial acceptance of the gospel, and who shall first enlist themselves under the great captain of their salvation: you should, by thus truly and deliberately laying yourselves under the most solemn and explicit ties to serve God according to the gospel of his Son, confirm and establish your faith and virtue; that you may be the more capable of, and the more diligent to adorn your Christian profession, and to promote the glory of God and the good of mankind in your several spheres!

These things should you do. This is the way to honour the Redeemer, and to advance the success and influence of his religion in the world. Unless you think, you can more effectually subserve his interest by *neglecting* his appointments, and your own improvement; and by teaching *others* with the power of your example to do so likewise.

Let me then intreat and persuade you by the authority of your great Lord, by the example of your Master and Saviour, by your own improvement and pleasure, and by the interest and honour of the Redeemer not to neglect an institution so easy, rational, and useful.

I am very sensible the *matter*, on which I have been pleading is only of a ritual and a positive nature: and that it is one of the less weighty and important points of the law and the gospel. But then the *principles*, which inforce an obedience to it are of an essential and eternal obligation.——And after we are convinced, that it is appointed by God, and subserves the best purposes of a religious and moral, of a personal and a publick nature, it is, I think, as clearly and strongly binding as any of the weightier matters of the Law. Christians cannot be ignorant of, or at a loss to determine about the reasonableness and excellency of our Lord's decisive judgment on a point of this nature. When reproving the Pharisees for their scrupulous and superstitious regard to rituals of the Mosaick law, whilst they neglected the great obligations of mercy and faith, of justice and the love of God; he says, *these last* they ought to have done, and *not to have left the other undone*. A rule this, which is universally decisive: and which encourages me to believe, that I have not laid an undue stress on this subject, or represented the

arguments in a stronger light than they will justly bear.

Would to God! that what has been said, may awaken a sense of duty in our minds! May the number of those who will seriously and solemnly take upon themselves the badge of the Christian profession continually increase! And *this* above all things let us pray, that *their conversation* who have by Baptism put on the Lord Jesus Christ may be such as becometh the gospel. May *they* who thus bind themselves to the Lord be more eminent and exemplary in the practice of every Christian, divine, and social virtue! That at length the great Lord and Judge may confess them as his sincere disciples before his Father, the heavenly host, and the whole assembled world. Amen.

C H A P. IV.

The Pleas for neglecting Baptism obviated.

IF we consider what motives ought to determine the conduct of reasonable creatures desirous of improving in religious virtue, or to what arguments Christians ought to submit their opinions and practice, it cannot remain a question, whether it becomes such to delay their obedience to a rite reasonable and useful in itself, and enjoined by that divine person, to whom we owe every expression of esteem, gratitude and love. And yet how common is it for those who acknowledge the divine authority of Baptism to postpone, or entirely to neglect that compliance with this rite, to which it's divine authority, (I will not scruple to say on every principle) binds us? A neglect and delay, which in serious
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and sober truth, can be excused by no other plea, than a full conviction that the law of Baptism does not obligate *us* who are descended from Christian parents; which is to suppose that our divine master consulted more the moral improvement and advantage of the first Christians, than ours in the institution of this rite; and that *they* stood in greater need of a memorial of his burial and resurrection, than we of later ages who are farther removed from the time in which this fact happened; and that a rite in it's own nature highly significant and useful then, ceases to be so now? when if used, it must still retain the same meaning, and be conducive to the same good purposes. But not to dwell on this plea, as I address myself to those who own the perpetuity of this institution and who cannot deny the obligations to obey it; which arise from the command and example of our master, from our own benefit, improvement and satisfaction, from a concern for the honour of our Lord, and the success of his religion in the world: I shall therefore insist on those excuses, which are more generally alledged to justify the continued neglect of this rite, and of a rational and becoming compliance with it.

And adopting the words of Ananias to Saul, I would with a modest freedom ask, *why tarriest thou?* Why do you hesitate in a point, in which the law is so plain, and the obligations are so forcible? Do you consider, what are your pleas? Can any plea, or any objection annul the law of Baptism, or our obligations to it? It stands in the Bible, as the law of the Son of God, whose claims to our obedience are most strong and engaging. Why then do we not hasten to perform every act which may express our reverence for his authority, and our sense of his love? Surely we are not *ashamed* to own him for our Lord and master, because
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the rite, by which we are to acknowledge him—is so generally neglected and slighted. Or do we consider it as a *matter of indifference*, because not *absolutely necessary* to our salvation; and therefore a point, which we are at liberty to observe and neglect, as we may find most suitable to our taste, or imagine most agreeable to our circumstances? Certainly we are not so immersed in the pleasures and engaged in the concerns of life, as to *find no time* for that consideration and repentance, for forming those virtuous resolutions and establishing those good habits, which should attend and follow this rite? Or does a consciousness of *our unworthiness and demerit*, and a timid apprehension of finally *falling away*, and *disgracing a profession* so solemnly, seriously, and voluntarily made deter us from our duty? With which of these pleas do we satisfy ourselves? Or which of them should we choose to offer to our master and judge?

SECTION I.

In the first place, Are we *ashamed to own* Christ for our Lord and master by the rite of Baptism? Do we make this passion, which is designed to restrain us from sin and ought to have this effect, an impediment in the way of our duty? If we attend to the nature and grounds of this influence of shame, it will convince us how weak and unreasonable it is. For are you called to practise any thing, that can *justly and properly* expose to the contempt and scorn of men? It is true; Baptism is a rite, a ceremony, an external form of expressing the sentiments of our minds: but is it on this account a reasonable matter of contempt? Are not rites, ceremonies and external forms supported by the usage and custom of all nations and communities? Has it not been the constant and universal practice of every civil society to receive new members by some particular rite?

rite? Does not some form necessarily attend the grant of every dignity amongst men? Have not all honourary distinctions their peculiar badges? How many ceremonies have been established in all ages to support the authority of, and to give lustre and state to Majesty itself? Indeed the expediency and use of some rite or other in all civil and political institutions, seems founded in human nature. And shall we exclude all rites and banish all ceremonies from religion? Or if a divine authority has enjoined them, shall we be ashamed to conform to them; when we are eager to wear every external badge of honour, and ready to submit to any rite to which *human* authority and wisdom have afforded their sanction in civil life? If Baptism, because a *rite*, cannot be considered as justly exposing us to scorn: Is it a rite of such a *nature* and *tendency*, that we cannot submit to it without inward confusion and the rising blush? We cannot be ashamed of its *design*: for it denotes the most fit and becoming affections and sentiments, those of repentance towards God and of faith in Jesus Christ. There is nothing ridiculous, or absurd in washing the body in water. And can the authority of God and his Son enjoining it, because in certain circumstances and performed with certain views it is a divine rite, can this convert it into a foolish action? The qualifications for Baptism and the ties by which it binds us are such, as in no degree contradict the soundest principles of reason. Indeed, the only reason we can alledge for our shame must be this: that it wants the sanction of the generality and the great. By this the best cause frequently suffers. To this it is owing that the cause of liberty daily loses its support among the Protestant Dissenters in general: when the wealthy, when persons of distinguished rank and who make a figure in the polite world, when such forsake any cause, they draw numbers after them; who

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are ashamed to appear on that side which the great, the noble, and the fashionable have deserted. Hence it is, that a rite reasonable, useful, and divine, is neglected by those that secretly avow its sacred authority. Though the generality blush not, in compliance with established forms and the practice of the many and the great absurdly to promise what an *Infant* shall believe and practise: even men of sense and judgement are not ashamed to use and join in the office of Infant-Baptism as retained in the church of England; though so much weakness, absurdity and nonsense (I speak with regret) run through it. But the institution of Baptism, as it lies in the *New Testament*, is not liable to any such charge. And whether we can be justified in refusing our obedience to it, is most easily determined. Is it more reasonable to follow the examples and customs of men, than to obey God? If we are ashamed to confess Christ before men according to his appointment; are we willing to incur and endure that disgrace and dishonour, into which we shall sink, when he shall be ashamed of us before his Father and his holy angels? Which is the most noble object of our pursuit, the praise of man, or the favour of God? And which ought to fill us with the most sensible confusion, to perform our duty, or to neglect it?

SECTION II.

Secondly, Another plea, by which the omission of this duty is defended is, that it is a *matter of indifference*; a point not absolutely necessary to our salvation; which we therefore conclude we are at liberty to observe, or neglect, as we may find most suitable to our taste, or may imagine most agreeable to our circumstances. This plea arises from a partial consideration of the subject, and leaves out what is of the greatest importance, namely, the authority of God in-
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joining the rite. In one view, it is indeed an indifferent matter and carries with it no obligations to enforce our obedience, that is, considered in itself without the sanction of God's law. But when it is commanded by God through the ministry of his Son, it ceases to be indifferent; it then possesses a claim to our reverent regard and it peculiarly binds Christians. For the institutions which are derived only from the wisdom and power of our great lawgiver, are appointed to try and evince our allegiance to him, and to serve as badges and criterions, by which we profess our submission to him. Whilst the other laws of piety and virtue, whose obligations are eternal and necessary, are the same in all ages and under every dispensation. The rites, which Christ alone has enjoined (so far from being of a trifling and indifferent nature) constitute a *distinguishing* part of the Christian code. An obedience to them is founded on this eternal and unchangeable rule of conduct, namely, the fitness and propriety of paying to every being with whom we are connected that respect and homage his character demands: And it is necessary, if we would acquit ourselves as uniform and consistent Christians, and would be found discharging every branch of evangelical duty. *Pagans and Infidels* may look upon these rites as indifferent, because they disown the *authority* that enacts them. But for *Christians* to think lightly of them and to condemn them in their practice, is an amazing inconsistency of character. This is to form our conduct according to our own tastes and humours, and not according to the appointment of Christ; to set aside his authority, and as far as our own choice and conduct reach to annul his law. Christ himself did not thus treat the mission of John and the authority by which he baptized.—Besides, though Baptism is not absolutely necessary to salvation, does it follow from
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hence, that it is in *no wise useful and important towards* answering this great end of our hope and pursuit? Is not a consistent and uniform character of piety and virtue necessary to salvation? Does the neglect of any one known duty agree with an uniform and consistent character? Is not every possible duty, every possible expression of reverence to God and of grateful homage to his Son necessary to complete and finish the Christian, to secure his Salvation, and to add lustre and brightness to his future crown? And yet here is a plain duty, here is a significant expression of grateful homage to Christ, which we scruple not to neglect from day to day. When we urge, that it is not absolutely necessary to Salvation, is it our intent to declare hereby, that we will fix bounds to our piety and limits to our obedience, lest we shall perform any thing, that might have been dispensed with without risking our final safety; and that we will discharge no duty, but what is absolutely necessary to save us from hell, without any regard or attention to the perfection, the lustre and beauty of our obedience to God and the Redeemer? Surely you will not avow this design. And yet the least attention is sufficient to convince us, what appearances of such a secret intention is conveyed by those pleas to evade the force of a plain duty. In a word, the ordinance of Baptism is not a matter of indifference to us Christians, since our Master and Lord has required it as a test of our regard to his authority. Nay, it is in some degree, *necessary to Salvation*, both to evince the sincerity, and to add to the perfection of our Christian character. And on the degrees of our obedience will depend the degrees of our future reward, as the last will bear a proportion to the first. But,

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SECTION III.

Thirdly, Another excuse for neglecting this ordinance of our religion is derived from that *multiplicity of business and cares*, in which some are involved. The engagements of life and the variety of social and domestick concerns are considered as so many obstructions to the practice of this duty. But here let it be considered that those previous exercises of the mind, that reflection and meditation, to which only our business and cares can be an hindrance, *these* are necessary, independent of that command, which enjoins Baptism as the method of confirming and expressing them. That we should examine the nature and evidences of the gospel; that we should review our own life; that we should endeavour to form good and virtuous habits and deliberately devote ourselves to the service of God, these are duties, to the discharge of which we are most strongly bound, as reasonable and immortal beings. If we neglect them, we omit the great business of life; the business, that demands our first and chief attention. And is an affair of such high importance and such everlasting moment, the only thing we may leave undone? Shall none of our hours, and none of our thoughts be sacred to this service? And can we, in sober reason, think, that the cares of this life will afford a sufficient apology for the neglect of the one thing needful? Besides, are we indeed so deeply immersed, so entirely engrossed by the concerns of this present state, as to find no opportunity to reflect, that we are invited to the honours of Christ's kingdom, that the service of God is our highest happiness, and that the reward of immortality is the worthiest object we can pursue? Cannot we steal a moment from this world for God and our souls? Yes, certainly, by prudence in our affairs and the proper direction of our time we shall be able to

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employ many moments, to fill up many hours in the exercises previous to, and necessarily connected with our Baptism and our Salvation. And if we feel how the concerns of life entangle our minds, and divert our attention from matters of eternal moment; how frequently they discompose our temper, and excite all the uneasy and malevolent passions in our breasts; if we are conscious to this ensnaring power of the world, and of our connections with it, what do wisdom and prudence dictate: but that we should use every means of rescuing our minds from it's unlawful influence, that we should call into our assistance every thought and purpose, by whose friendly aid our bosoms may be preserved calm and undisturbed amidst the storms of life, serene and composed amidst all the cross accidents which occur; so that the avocations of this state may not distract our minds, that we may not sink under it's distresses, nor faint under it's toils? Now Baptism, with that serious and deliberate choice of religion, that faith in Christ, and that firm resolution for God and virtue, Baptism with those exercises of the soul that attend it, serves excellently to form that temper, and to establish that inward frame which will fit us to discharge the duties and to meet the trials of a busy and anxious life, with composure and delight, with honour and credit. So that the multiplicity of our business and concerns suggests a powerful reason for our speedy compliance with the law of Baptism.

SECTION IV.

Fourthly, *An apprehension of unworthiness* is commonly urged as a plea by which the neglect of this institution is defended.—This objection proceeds from the want of a due attention to the nature and design of the ordinance, as if we thought it intended only for the use and improvement of the most perfect and exalted

Christians; whereas it is the Baptism of *repentance* for the remission of sin. The use of it is founded in our unworthiness: were we not sinners we should not need an institution, which is an emblem of our being washed from our sins, and exhibits the hope of forgiveness. A consciousness of our demerit, as having offended the Lord of heaven and earth, is the best qualification for it. This rite is designed to encourage the hope, to express the sorrow, and to confirm the resolution of the sincere penitent. Say we then that we are unfit; because that we are conscious to the guilt of our characters, as sinners? We should rather say, that we are the fit and proper subjects of this ordinance; and from hence derive encouragement, and on this ground form the purpose of submitting to it. Are our good purposes wavering and the virtuous affections weak? This is the way to fix the rising purpose of virtue, and to establish the good affections. Are we only entering on a course of Religion, and making the first advances to God and Heaven? Baptism is the rite, by which we should begin the Christian profession, and enter upon a good life. Consider the purposes, for which it was appointed, and observe how far your temper corresponds with them. It was appointed to commemorate the burial and resurrection of Christ, and to signify our faith in him as the Son of God: in this view all are fit for it, who firmly and from the heart believe these truths. It is a memorial of God's pardoning mercy, it is the mark of a penitent mind, and denotes our determined resolution to die unto sin, and to walk in all newness of life: so that in *this respect* all are prepared for it, who are willing to solicit the pardon, and to forsake the practice of sin. It is a pledge of our reverent subjection to the authority of Christ, and of our mutual affection to the whole community of Christians: and in this sense all are qualified for it, who are ready to form their

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faith and practice by the gospel of Christ, and whose hearts overflow with a diffusive benevolence. These are the uses of the ordinance; are these the purposes and dispositions of our minds? If they are, why tarry we? Let us arise, and *be Baptized and wash away our sins, calling upon the name of the Lord.*

Consider again, that the earliest converts were directed upon the first intimations they gave of their faith in Christ, and repentance towards God, to submit to this rite, and accordingly they yielded an obedience to it without delay. Thus, under the direction of the apostles, immediately in consequence of Peter's advice, "The three thousand that gladly received the word, were Baptized." As soon as "the Samaritans believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, they were baptized." Three days after his conversion was Saul, the persecutor, baptized. Directly after the preaching of Peter was the ordinance administered to Cornelius and his household. In the same hour of the night in which the Jailor was converted, were he and all his washed in the laver of regeneration. Now from these various instances it appears, that the earliest converts under the guidance of the apostles submitted to this ordinance, as the first act in the Christian life, and the first expression of sincere repentance. Neither the suddenness of their conversion, nor the aggravated guilt of their former character, nor their imperfect acquaintance with the Christian Faith, the necessary consequence of the short space intervening between their conversion and Baptism, nor the weakness of their resolutions were any hindrances or obstructions in the way of this duty. But how does the conduct of Christians in later ages comport with these examples? It is our advantage, that our knowledge ripens with our growing years; that from the earliest

dawn of life we are called to the faith and obedience of the gospel. So that a pious and penitent heart is the only pre-requisite to our observance of this institution. And where this is not wanting, every delay removes us farther from a conformity to the intention of the rite, and the pattern of the primitive Christians.—If this, indeed, is wanting, if we have never seriously and solemnly determined for the service of God; it is a mournful case, it is most seriously interesting; for waving all considerations of our unsuitness for Baptism, we are not qualified for the Salvation of God, nor prepared to die. And whether this is a state, in which a reasonable, an immortal creature should continue for one day, one hour, or one minute, do you judge.

SECTION V.

Fifthly, Some urge *their fears*, lest they should fall away from, or disgrace the profession of the gospel, as a reason why they neglect to make the solemn and deliberate vow of their Baptism. But this plea suggests the most pleasing prospect of a persevering and steady course of piety and virtue. For from what does it proceed, but from a desire to maintain a consistency, and support a decorum of character: it argues an humble consciousness of our weakness, and a just apprehension of those various temptations and snares, to which we are exposed; and it arises from a tenderness of soul, that is shocked with the distant appearances of sin. Now all these sources of such fearful apprehensions afford so many securities and guards to our piety and virtue: they will make us cautious and circumspect, and they will lead us with ardent devotion to seek the assistance of heaven. And who is so likely to prove an ornament to the Christian Faith, and a faithful disciple unto death, as the humble, cautious, and dependent Christian? Besides, if a sense of your own imperfections

and weakness begets these fears, should you not seek the establishment and perfection of your virtues by every means which nature and the gospel affords? And the more seriously and solemnly you avow the profession, and submit to the obligations of the Christian Faith, a sense of duty will be more strongly impressed on the mind; and give firmness and vigour to your resolutions.

These are the most common pleas, by which the neglect of this ordinance is supported; however plausible they may appear, they seem, when examined, to be void of all real force and strength: and the replies I have given to them, I hope, when duly weighed, will not fail to convince us of our duty, and to engage our immediate compliance with it.

Other excuses indeed are formed, of which some notice should be taken. As to that, which is drawn from the hazard the health may sustain; the experience of those who have used this rite according to the primitive model, the peculiar tendency of cold-bathing to restore vigour and health to the weak and tender, and the sentiments of physicians with respect to Christian Baptism in particular, prove that this objection is without any foundation in the reason of things; and evince that this rite, so far from being hurtful, is very salutary and beneficial. The terms of administering this rite in some places may be such, as a rational Christian, who regards only the authority of Christ, cannot comply with. It is a just matter of lamentation that Christians fix on new terms of communion. Philip baptized the Eunuch, only on this simple confession, "*I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*" Acts xviii. 37. Whoever professes this, and adorns it with a suitable conduct, according to the gospel models ought to be

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embraced in the arms of Christian affection and love.* This Faith alone entitles us to Baptism. No Ministers or People are authorized to claim the profession of any other article: and whoever will administer the rite on these terms, cannot reasonably be considered as laying any impediment in the way of our duty by his own private sentiments on other points; for he is a *Christian Minister*, and as such is a proper and qualified person for the administration of the Christian ordinance: And to receive it from his hands, though we judge his opinions in other respects erroneous, will discover and beautifully exemplify the Christian spirit of candour, catholicism and love. There remains, but one objection more against a compliance with this rite, which is urged by those, who have received what bears the name of infant Baptism; and who at maturer years commenced partakers of the Lord's Supper. They presume, that the profession they made of their faith in Christ by the last institution, abrogates all obligation to submit to the former. But they do not attend to the difference between the two rites: for one is a memorial of the death, the other of the burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Now if in obedience to his authority we have shewed forth his death; ought we not in obedience to the same authority to observe the rite, that exhibits

* The reader is desired to consider how clearly that is expressed in some other places of those sacred books from which alone we are under the gospel-state to learn the terms of Communion and the Faith essential to the Christian character. Thus *John* xx. 31. "But these are written, that ye might believe that *Jesus in the Christ* the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name." *1 John* iv. 15. "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God." *So* ch. v. 1. "Whosoever believeth that *Jesus is the Christ*, is born of God." *Rom.* x. 9. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." See also *Matth.* xvi. 13—19.

the emblems of his burial and resurrection? Can the performance of one duty, justify the neglect of another? Are we not bound by every sentiment of reverence, affection, and gratitude to our Lord to *fulfill all righteousness*, and to obey all his commands? Will what was imposed on us in our infancy, without the authority of scripture excuse our neglect of *that*, which the example and command of Christ and the practice of his apostles join to enforce? Our divine master did not consider his circumcision, which was a divine rite, as sufficient to excuse his neglect of the Baptism of John?

In a word, let all, who are convinced of perpetuity of Baptism, submit to the force of argument, and yield to the authority of Christ. Dismiss all vain pleas, and plausible excuses. As we cannot annul, so let us not neglect a plain command! The duty is easy: the rite is very significant and useful. The example of Christ recommends it; and his express law enjoins it. It is mean and base to be ashamed of his injunctions. What he commands cannot be indifferent to Christians. A consciousness of our demerit and guilt leading us to real repentance entitles us to the benefits of Baptism. And let no timid apprehensions deter us from our obedience: for modesty and humility afford the best security to virtue. Why do we tarry? Let us arise and be Baptized. *To delay*, in a point of duty, is weak and unreasonable. Delays beget objections, and strengthen our reluctance. The apostles were speedy to administer Baptism: The earliest converts hastened to the laver of regeneration. *To delay*, is to postpone our pleasure, and to trifle with our improvement: nay, it discovers an irreverence and inattention to the will of Christ, that ill becomes those who wear the Christian name. Once more, to delay is a high degree of imprudence and folly; for we know not how soon death may surprize us: and it will afford

tis no comfort in our last moments, and inspire us with no courage at the bar of God, to reflect that we have lived in the entire neglect of any commandment of Christ, though it should be one of the least. And *then* we shall be ashamed of those vain pleas and empty excuses, we now study to form.

To conclude, blessed are they, that do his commandments: for they have a right to the tree of life, and shall enter into the city of our God.

CHAP. V.

Directions to the Candidates for Baptism.

WHEN the apostle, to engage the generous liberality of the Corinthians towards the Christians in Judea, proposes to them the example of the Macedonians, he ascribes their munificence to their devotedness to Jesus Christ. This *they did* (says he) i. e. contributed to the wants of their fellow Saints and Christians in Judea, in a manner that far exceeded all our expectations *and not as we hoped: but first gave their own-selves to the Lord, and to us* and our assistance, by and in obedience to the *will of the Lord.* 2 Cor. viii. 5. From that zeal and piety with which the Macedonians dedicated themselves to the service of Christ, flowed their tender benevolence and abundant liberality. Their having assumed the Christian character with all its obligations, was the spring of such great and benevolent virtue. So friendly an aspect has the Christian Faith, when cordially received, upon all the kind and social affections. Happy would it be if all, to whom the doctrine and offices of Christ are proposed, would embrace

brace them with that sincerity and ardour, with which it becomes us to receive a prophet so excellent, and a doctrine so important! Happy would it be, vastly conducive to our own improvement and joy, and to the honour and credit of our Religion; if we would put on the Lord Jesus with that seriousness and solemnity, with that ardour and zeal for our master and his service, which would lead us to the exercise of the same tender and liberal generosity. We may with reason suppose, that this would be the consequence of assuming the Christian character, by the deliberate and voluntary use of the rite of Baptism which comes so powerfully recommended to our reverent regard by the command of Christ, the practice of his apostles, and the example of the first Christians. At least *the tendency* of this rite is to fix the virtuous resolutions, and to impress the mind deeply with all the obligations of the Christian character. This is plain from the moral uses connected with it, and from the motives by which the practice of it is enforced. It will still more clearly appear from considering those directions and rules, which are not only in themselves proper, but even necessary to be observed by us, when we give ourselves to the Lord by the rite of Baptism. To this we now proceed. This rite being an appointed acknowledgement of our faith in Christ, a token of our submission to the authority of his laws and the obligations of his religion; and producing a pause in life necessarily leads to serious reflection, and mature thought. It engages us to consider, what sentiments we thereby profess; on what grounds and reasons we profess the Christian Faith?—What course and conduct we have hitherto pursued? And what temper and deportment we propose to cultivate for the future? These are the reflections previous to Baptism. It is only to indulge to these reflections and to give these thoughts free scope, and we shall be found

found practising whatever is necessary and expedient to give our submission to the rite of Baptism it's efficacy and force.

SECTION I.

In the first place then, take a *general view and survey of the Christian scheme*; and consider what is the faith, you are about so solemnly and deliberately to profess. The survey I would recommend, is only a view of the outlines of the Christian doctrine, and what is most plainly implied in the belief of it's fundamental article, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. For a perfect knowledge of the Christian system can be the result only of repeated enquiries: and as our knowledge grows more perfect, it will still admit of further improvements, and new discoveries will continue to repay our study. Such a view, therefore, of the particular branches and of the general connection of the evangelical system, as we may suppose would offer itself to the least attentive mind: Such a survey of the Christian principles, I would now present before you, to lead and direct your thoughts. Religion is either *natural*, or *revealed*. *Natural* is such, as we are capable of discovering by the use of our own powers and capacities, and is the foundation and basis of *revealed*, or of those truths and doctrines, the knowledge of which we cannot attain without some supernatural and extraordinary discoveries, mediately or immediately, from God. As to the first of these, from reflections on the constitution of the world, and the human frame, and from the general judgement of mankind in all ages and through all nations, we learn that there is one self-existent, independent and supreme spirit; who is unlimited in his nature, perfections and duration: That he is the source and center, the spring and author of all beauty, excellency, life, perfection and bliss: That he created

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all things by his Almighty power with unerring wisdom, and from the most generous design of diffusing excellency, glory, and happiness through the universe. That he preserves, maintains, and direct all things by his parental goodness, and infinite understanding: and that He is the Lord, governor and judge of all rational creatures, among whom is the human race. Hence we are led to contemplate his conduct and treatment of mankind ever since they were placed on this earth. Here the Bible presents us with a history of the different and various measures pursued by the divine wisdom and goodness to raise us to the knowledge, religion, virtue, and happiness, of which we are capable. The first Pair, *Gen. ii. and iii.* created in the image of God, invested with dominion over this lower creation, are placed in the seats of bliss and joy, and endowed with a conditional immortality. They violated the law, by which they held this distinguished blessing; and by this transgression became the heirs of misery and of death. Here opens the plan, which in the fulness of time, was to be accomplished by Jesus Christ. It is graciously promised, that the seed of the woman should remove the penal effects, which arose from the serpent having seduced the innocent race. This promise, though conveyed in different terms, is frequently repeated to the Patriarchs, to preserve a sense of God's government and the hopes of a future state. When idolatry was spread over the face of the earth, God called Abraham into a peculiar relation to himself, *Gen. xii. ch.* and chose one particular branch of his family to support the knowledge of the one God; to maintain the interest of true Religion; and to convey down from generation to generation the promise of that person by whom He would, in some future period, redeem the human race from sin and guilt, especially from death. This nation was separated, and kept distinct from the

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other people of the earth by particular laws, rites and ceremonies, favoured with special means of Religious knowledge and practice, and defended with a peculiar providence. In the fulness of time, lo! the long predicted and long expected Messiah appears. Lo! he comes, who is the *Son of God* and the Saviour of the world.—To effect the purposes of this most gracious and important character, He, first, opens the divine will, by giving the best and purest instructions in piety and virtue; by unfolding the grace and love of God in the mission of his only begotten Son, not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might live; by teaching the doctrine of repentance and forgiveness of sins; by explaining the dignity of his own character, the nature of his claims, and the design of his coming; by the display of remarkable wisdom, gentleness and authority in his instructions; and by exhibiting the most amiable, engaging and perfect example of every devout and virtuous disposition in his temper and life. He then, *secondly*, to accomplish the purposes of the divine mercy, humbled himself so far, as to end a distressed life by a death attended with every circumstance of ignominy and pain; knowing that his death, which was a most acceptable act of obedience to God and the strongest proof of his love to man, would be the means through which the world would receive from the mercy of God forgiveness and life—having lived as the prophet of God, having died as a propitiation for our sins, and given up himself a ransom for many. He, *thirdly*, is invested with all authority and power after his resurrection from the dead; and as a reward of his inexpressible piety and grace in dying for us, is exalted to preside over the affairs of the world and of the church, and He improves his exalted dignity in the character of our Saviour and Mediator. He sends down the Holy Spirit in a rich variety of gifts, to enlighten the minds and to

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confirm the preaching of the apostles, to convince and sanctify men. All things in Heaven, in earth, and under the earth are subjected to his dominion. He is our advocate with the Father ; through whom all prayers are to be offered up to the divine Majesty, through whom we receive full encouragement to present our sincere and humble requests unto God : whose faithfulness and grace, whose power and wisdom are continually, though invisibly, exercised to maintain his Religion in the world, and to succour and bless his faithful disciples. He is gone into Heaven as our forerunner, and as such to prepare mansions of purity, peace and bliss for all his genuine followers. And we are taught, fourthly, to expect a more illustrious and gracious manifestation of his character; as our Saviour and Mediator at the end of the world ; when he will again appear to raise the dead, to bestow that life which he died to secure to us : to summon the world before his tribunal, to determine their character and state according to their conduct in the body, to dispense eternal rewards and punishments, and in a word, to act as the august, merciful, and righteous judge of the world ! Thus will terminate the plan of divine mercy for our redemption from sin and death ; a most important and gracious plan, proceeding from the mercy of *God* our heavenly Father, and executed by the Ministry of *Jesus Christ* ; whom *God* sent into the world : whose mission *He* supported by miraculous powers and gifts, especially by his resurrection from the dead ; whom *God* invested with all dominion and authority ; and to whom *He* assigned the kind and weighty offices of our instructor and sacrifice, our Lord and judge. This is a general view of the Religion, which you are to profess ; this is the divine and excellent character, which you are to avow. Dwell on this view. Ponder the plain and incontestable particulars of which it consists. Make

it familiar to your minds. It has this to recommend it, that it is uniform, easy to be understood, and contains every article which the apostles preached as necessary to convert men to the Christian Faith. Having weighed these excellent and momentous principles, having taken this comprehensive view of a character so full of dignity and grace, consider,

SECTION II.

Secondly, On what *grounds and reasons* you are to embrace this faith. The arguments which evince the divine authority of Jesus Christ are more numerous, convincing and plain, than those by which any other matter of fact is supported. An attention to them is necessary to render our faith in the gospel reasonable, to supply us with solid evidences of the hope that is in us, and to establish our attachment to this religion. That above seventeen hundred years since, there existed such a person as Jesus Christ is as clear, as that at the same period Judea was a province of the Roman Empire. That this Jesus assumed an extraordinary character, saying, that he was the Son of God, the Saviour of sinners, the Lord of all, and the judge of the World, is clear from the books which contain the history of his life and preaching. The only point of enquiry is, by what arguments, by what proofs are these claims supported? Is He the Son of God? Is He a person of such an high original, and of such an exalted a character? Yes, He is. He has proved the truth of what he said, by the most clear and incontestable evidences. For, to seize this opportunity of grounding yourselves in the faith you are to acknowledge, ask yourselves, Did ever any man convince him of sin? Did ever any one speak as he did? Can we suppose his doctrine false, when he delivered such exalted rules of piety and virtue; and exemplified them in his life, with such purity,

rity, sublimity and perfection ? To his instructions and example you will add; the mighty works he performed.—The blind and lame, the sick and dying, the raging elements and the dead feel the power of his voice, and instantly obey. With a word did he effect the most surprizing and unexpected cures on enemies as well as friends, on persons at a distance as well as on those who touched him. Could any one have done these works, unless God had been with him ? No assuredly ! the works, that he did, bore witness to him, that the father was with him.—To his example, his preaching and his works, you will join his resurrection from the dead. To this does Christ himself refer ; to this do his apostles refer ; as the great and most distinguishing proof, that Christ was the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. On this do both He and they rest the truth of their claims, and the hope of Christians. On what evidence is *this fact* founded ? By what proofs was it confirmed ? You yourselves have never been favoured with a sight of the risen Lord ? You will consider, whether you are furnished with sufficient reasons to believe them who say, that they did see and converse with him after his resurrection from the dead. You will ask, were not their senses deluded, and they themselves deceived with some phantom or dream ? The least reflection will lead you to reply, It cannot be supposed. You will observe, that they had no previous apprehension of this event ; that they did not encourage any expectation of it ; or appear to have wished it. That when some women brought the report of his resurrection, they treated it with indifference ; they discovered the utmost backwardness and reluctance to believe it ; 'till their own eyes had seen, their own ears had heard, and their own hands had handled the word of life.—And this evidence they enjoyed not once, or only for the present instant, but for the space

of forty days, during which time they received from the mouth of the risen Saviour divers instructions for their future Ministry. And he was seen not by one, or by a few only, but by all his disciples, nay by five hundred. The apostles, you will therefore conclude, could not be under a delusion, or mistake. Upon further examination you will find it more absurd to suppose, that they intended to deceive and delude by a false story of the resurrection of their master.—You will appeal to your own sense and reason, whether it can be imagined, that twelve plain illiterate men should unite in propagating a lie; that they should persist in it without contradicting, or deserting one another; that they should do it in the country, and immediately after the time when and where the event was said to happen, so that the falsehood must have been discovered, and the forgery exposed to the world; that they should do this before even those very persons who put Jesus to death, and whose honour and credit with the people, as well as whose malice would most strongly prompt them to confute the report of his resurrection, if it had not been true; that *they* should do this, who a few days back had forsaken Jesus, and given up all their hopes from him. Whence came these returning expectations? From what was this fortitude derived in them who a little before had betrayed a spirit so dastardly, cowardly and mean? From what? but from truth, and a consciousness of truth? That they should preach this fact, which if it was false, they must know to be false; at the same time, that they disclaimed all the rich and great things of life; when they gave up all the advantages and comforts of life they already enjoyed; when thus they exposed themselves, without remedy, to imprisonment, to penalties, to poverty, to torture, and to death; when they expected no other advantages from these sufferings, than a reward in the world to come: This

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consideration evinces, not only the folly but the impiety of these persons, if they knew they did not speak the words of truth. What! will you argue, with yourselves, give up all that was dear in the present life, and expect a reward in the future world for imposing *a lie* on mankind? Were there ever views so mad, or hopes so profane? They who can impute this to the apostles, can believe and imagine any thing. You will then proceed one step further and reflect that if they were deceived themselves, or if they had intended to deceive mankind; in neither case would their preaching have been successful. For without worldly wisdom, without power, without riches, without any temporal authority, without any sentiments or opinions suitable to the prejudices or vices of mankind, they were to change the religion and customs of the Pagans and Jews; and to oppose the Philosopher, the Priest, the Scribe, the Prince; the superstitious notions and vices of common people, both of the Jews and Gentiles; the usages of many ages; the temples of the Gods, and all that innumerable tribe that was supported by the worship of idols. These various and powerful foes they did oppose, and successfully opposed, only by truth and the presence of God bearing them witness with signs and miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost. Their preaching was effectual to convert the world from idolatry and vice to the pure worship of one God and the practice of virtue; even when their conversion evidently exposed them to every temporal evil. And in consequence of their message thus successful and their preaching thus triumphant over every obstruction, Christianity does now exist in the world. It gained ground then, and has maintained it's ground ever since. These are the great reasons, you will say, on which I may with boldness avow my opinion of the truth of the Christian Religion. And on these principles

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I would hold firm the Faith, till any one can clearly reconcile the purity of Christ's preaching and pattern with the supposition of his being an impostor; till any one can prove, that without the presence of God, the apostles could have performed so many and such miraculous works; till any one can prove either that they were deceived themselves, or that they could have succeeded in such a fraud and could have imposed on mankind such a falshood: till these things can be plainly evinced, nothing can expose my faith as weak, and nothing ought to shake it. And at no time can we more properly thus think on the evidences of our Religion, than when we are about to avow it's divine authority and truth: and to do this by an act, that denotes the purity of the Christian Religion; that exhibits a memorial of it's great blessing, the forgiveness of sin, and it's grand evidence, the resurrection of Christ. The performance of this duty,

SECTION III.

Thirdly, Affords a proper opportunity for *reviewing your temper and conduct.* Now stand still; and look back on the years that are past, and determining thus to devote yourselves to the Lord and Saviour of mankind, scrutinize into your hearts and recollect the general tenor of your behaviour and as many particular instances of your deportment, as a treacherous memory may retain; to see to whom you have hitherto yielded yourselves servants, and what has been the law of your actions. That you should do this with greater particularity and solemnity than is usual, at least once in life, is highly reasonable: And what season, more convenient and proper for it than the present, when the thoughts naturally take a serious turn, and flow in a good and pure channel? When a sense of God's authority, and the desire of his acceptance in the duty
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before you will assist the recollection and composure of the mind.—Now then retire, you are soon to profess your repentance towards God, as well as your faith in Jesus Christ ; of what actions and affections do you repent ? And is your repentance hearty and sincere ? What has there been guilty and blameable in your heart and life ? And do you think of it with real compunction of mind and deep heart felt sorrow ? You are about to seek the forgiveness of your past sins ; and what have been those sins ? And are you indeed disposed to forsake them ? Now pursue the deliberate and thorough search into the state of your soul. Now make a free and effectual scrutiny into the disposition of your mind towards God and virtue.—To assist and direct your enquiry, recall the past and distant years. Think, through what different stages of life you have passed : in what circumstances you have been placed, what characters and relations you have supported ? And how you have behaved in each period ; how you have conducted yourselves in the relations of a sacred, or a social nature, or of the domestick, or of the public kind. Consider what advantages for religion and virtue you have enjoyed, and how they have been improved ? What mercies and blessings have brightened your days, and what fruits of gratitude and obedience they have produced ? What afflictions and distresses have befallen you, and how you met and sustained them ? Read the law of God ; reflect on the particular, as well as general rules of duty, it contains (with such we are supplied in our Lord's sermon on the mount, and at the end of the epistles) and distinctly enquire ; have you observed this law, obeyed that precept, or practised the other virtue ? Enquire, what apprehensions you have entertained of God, and how you have behaved towards him ? Whether you have revered his authority, rejoiced in his providence, been habitually conscious

to his presence, and been thankful for his mercies? Have you heard his word, engaged in his worship, and observed his day with delight and pleasure; or not? Enquire whether integrity and uprightness have directed your dealings with men, and how you have been disposed to the offices of humanity and love? Enquire whether you have made conscience of your words and thoughts; and if you have regarded the rules of sobriety and temperance? Let these questions be proposed with calmness and deliberation: and be answered honestly, and impartially, as in the sight of God, and as determining a point of the highest concern. Thus consider your ways and your doings, and endeavour to attend to every circumstance, which has aggravated your guilt, and which may leave on your mind a deeper and more lasting sense of the evil and malignity of sin, and of the worth and value of the divine mercy. Consider how far you have violated the laws of God, in opposition to the light of knowledge, to the force of education, to the repeated favours and the great indulgence of heaven, to the convictions of your own minds, and to renewed resolutions for virtue? Having thus taken such a particular, impartial, and deliberate view of your past deportment towards God and man, as will give you a true idea of yourselves, and contribute to render your repentance real, hearty and effectual,

SECTION IV.

In the last place, Consider *the nature and reasonableness, the importance and necessity of that holiness* which by Baptism you resolve to pursue. By this rite you avow your solemn and voluntary purpose to die unto sin, and to walk in all newness of life. Now is this a resolution, reasonable in itself, and conducive to your welfare and bliss? Is it a resolution, that you will ever after have cause to approve of and adhere to? Form this purpose then,

then, take an extensive view of the grounds of holiness, and seriously examine of its nature and consequences. Consider its reasonableness. An holy life is only following the dictates of conscience; it is behaving towards God our heavenly Father, as earthly parents expect their children should behave towards them; and it is treating men by those rules of equity and mercy, by which each expects the conduct of others towards himself should be regulated. It is gratitude to God, to whom we owe our being itself, its continual support, and all the joys which render life a blessing; to whom we owe the gospel, the hopes of Heaven, and our designation for it. It is gratitude to the Son of God, whose generous love gives him the strongest claim to our service. Each virtue, each grace, which holiness implies, approves itself to every mind. It is reason; it is gratitude; it is true beauty. Nothing so lovely and pleasing, as a good man. Further it is happiness. It conduces, tends to and promotes health of body, success of affairs, esteem with men, serenity of mind, a free and unsuspected intercourse in all the concerns of life, and private, domestick and publick harmony. It embalms the memory, and stamps the character with lasting reputation. It does more, it gives peace and hope in death. Nay, it does more than this; it prepares us for life and bliss beyond the grave. If we are holy, the judge will pronounce to us, "Well done good and faithful servants;" and an abundant entrance shall be administered to us into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the portion of the holy. Think on these things. Think on them, till your bosoms glow with the rising purpose. Consider them, and again consider them, till your purpose is most free, solemn and firm. Never lose sight of these views of the reasonableness, the beauty, the happiness of becoming the servants of holiness. It will

will add strength, perfection and perseverance to the good purpose.

These are the directions we would offer to those, who in compliance with the dictates of their duty and improvement are willing to take upon them the vow of Christian Baptism : we leave it to their own minds to determine the reasonableness, expediency and usefulness of these advices. If they are seriously followed, will Baptism be a mere matter of form, or a useless service? Will it not be an action pregnant with the best and most valuable effects, contributing to the perfection of our nature, and terminating in a conduct which no choice or pursuit can equal in the solidity of its grounds, the comfort and honour of its present fruits, or the glory and bliss of its future rewards.

CH A P. VI.

Advice to baptised Christians.

IF the considerations and arguments offered in the preceeding chapters have produced the desired effect, I shall have the pleasure of now addressing those who have given themselves to the Lord by Baptism. Such will naturally enquire, how they may act agreeably to the vows of God which are upon them. I would fain indulge the hope, that others may be forming the secret purpose of thus commencing professed disciples of Christ : and such may be supposed concerned to know, how they may honourably support the character they are about to assume. For the assistance of both may I be permitted to lay down a few important directions ; which they, who have taken upon them-

themselves the Christian Profession; ought seriously to regard. When the solemn act is over; it must be our duty to recollect it frequently, to maintain a temper and deportment worthy of the Lord, to guard against every thing that would lead us aside from God and our own deliberate engagements, and to aim at a persevering and improving purity and virtue.

SECTION I.

First, *Recollect and review* frequently this solemn transaction. Remember, and consider that the vows of God are upon you: recollect the engagements of Baptism to rejoice in them, and confirm them. Recollect them, to excite your holy joy. To reflect, that at such a time, and with such a rite, suited to strike the memory and the conscience you surrendered yourselves to God and the Redeemer, cannot fail to yield satisfaction. To think that by one deliberate act you have consecrated yourself a living sacrifice to that Being, to whose supreme authority and rich goodness you owe all that you can give; and that by the same act you did, as solemnly and cordially, bind yourselves in every instance to revere, love and serve the divine person who bought you with his blood, and who is the Lord of all, this will afford you matter for self-applause; the joy of which can be equalled by nothing, but by the consciousness of having maintained and supported your allegiance to God and the Redeemer. Recollecting then this transaction so important and serious, you will approve of it; and approving of it, your mind will be in a serene and peaceable state. Reflect with pleasure, that you have made a surrender of your hearts and lives, where they are most justly due, in a manner, that evinced your reverential regard to the authority of Jesus Christ and to the appointments of heavenly wisdom: and this pleasure will be heightened by a consciousness

sciousness of your piety and resolution in differing from the example of the many who neglect the badge of the Christian profession, or are ashamed of it. In the remembrance of this transaction rejoice, because it emboldens and animates the aspirations of your hearts to God, as the Being whom you have thus publicly chosen and avowed as your God and portion. Rejoice, whilst you repeat the anthems of praise and again feel the emotions of gratitude, which at that season filled your hearts, and employed your tongues. Remember your Baptism; that you may preserve a lively and grateful sense of the invaluable blessings of which it is a memorial and emblem. Every view, under which the memory of it can be renewed, has a tendency to inspire and improve devout joy.

Again recollect this solemn and voluntary act to confirm and establish your grateful and reverential regards to your heavenly Father and divine Master. Embrace the first favourable hour, after the duty is performed, to retire; and when the curtain of retirement is drawn around you, think on the character you have assumed, and on the sacred ties by which you have bound yourselves. Whilst the conscience is still tender, and yielding to the dictates of truth and duty, and the serious impressions are still lively and warm, retire and examine how far your vows were sincere and your resolutions determined and entire; or rather to what temper and conduct, to what choice, pursuits, and affections these sincere vows and determined resolutions should lead. "Retire and say, I have now, in the
 "presence of God and men, avowed myself, with my
 "free choice and full consent, the servant of God,
 "and the disciple of Christ. And what doth this sacred and important, what doth this high and exalted character include? Whatever virtue, and what-

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“ever degree of virtue it implies; be it, with divine aid, my steady aim, the object of my daily care to reach to and practise it. Thus may the solemn transaction, that hath passed this day on earth be ratified in heaven. May my God and Redeemer succour and reward me.” To the same purpose you should frequently turn back your minds to this serious act, and carry about with you at all times a sense of these vows. When the revolving year brings round the day; or when you are called to be spectators of the piety and cheerfulness, with which others give themselves to the Lord, you will be furnished with fit and apt opportunities to bring the season of your covenanting with God again to mind, and to fix the conviction that you are not your own. So the example of others will aid the improvement and establishment of your Christian character: and the progress of time with all its diversified scenes of cares and pleasures will not be sufficient to erase the impressions you first felt, or entirely to extinguish the ardour and zeal of your first vows. For to recollect, with seriousness and composure, the vows of your Baptism will be to renew them: to renew them, by this repeated remembrance, will render their force habitual: and when they possess the power of a confirmed habit, the mind will almost always find itself as fully and earnestly determined for the service of God, as it was at first,

SECTION II.

Secondly, *Walk worthy of the Lord*, to whom you have cheerfully and entirely consecrated yourselves. For this reason “We are buried with Christ by Baptism unto death; that like as Christ, was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we should walk in newness of life: reckon yourselves then to be dead unto sin; but alive unto God through Jesus Christ

“ Christ our Lord : let not sin therefore reign in your
 “ mortal body, that you should obey it in the lusts
 “ thereof, neither yield your members as instruments of
 “ unrighteousness unto sin, but yield yourselves unto
 “ God as those that are alive from the dead, and your
 “ members as instruments of righteousness unto God.”

Consider yourselves, first, as entitled to the privileges
 and charged with the obligations of the Christian Faith;
 value the former and revere the latter : form the temper
 and pursue that course of life, you are thus taught to
 aspire after. Remember that, by your own voluntary,
 determined and solemn consent and profession, you are
 a Christian : and let a high regard for the sacred cha-
 racter, you have seriously and publicly assumed, run
 through every circumstance of your lives. Let it ap-
 pear that a lively sense of what this character requires,
 purifies, ennobles and humanizes the soul. Let the
 offices of piety be performed with reverent composure,
 regular zeal and lively gratitude. Let the avocations
 and business of life be pursued with moderation, though
 followed with diligence, and be dispatched with a
 humble dependance on the presiding providence of God
 for success. Indulge to the innocent amusements and
 diversions of life with that temperance and prudence,
 that will render them consistent with and subservient to
 the nobler designs of the Christian profession. Trace
 every footstep of the divine goodness : observe with
 what mercies each day and period of life is crowned :
 receive with gratitude the providential favours, to the
 enjoyment of which you return every morning, and
 which, unseen and unfelt, attend you every night :
 raise the joyful eye to that good Being whose liberal
 hand is always dispensing new mercies, and has by
 Jesus Christ enriched you with the highest blessings :
 look round you, survey distant ages, and extend your
 views to distant periods, and see the goodness of God
 shining

shining through all. For thus will be produced that chearful grateful heart, that mild countenance, and habitual serenity, which become the Christian. Meet the disappointments, the little cross accidents, and the greater afflictions of life with that pious submission, steady fortitude, and calm meekness, to which his benevolent philosophy and his exalted views should form the Christian. Circumspectly watch against every snare, and resist every solicitation with integrity and constancy. In the intercourses of civil life, remember you are called to be true and faithful, sincere and just. All this the gospel demands, all this the world expects of a Christian. Nay, you are to aim at habits more amiable and generous. Pursue, endeavour to feel and to exercise an unfeigned and unrestrained, a tender and warm love of mankind. Guard against, check and subdue all the secret workings and outward expressions of ill nature, selfishness, anger and revenge. Let your whole soul be drawn out in affection to others, and the bosom glow with generous purposes. Let the countenance shine with the beamings of humility and meekness; the carriage be easy and modest; and your words to all, especially to your inferiors, soft and gentle, courteous and condescending. Judge not, that you be not judged. Speak evil of no man. Do nothing injurious, or hurtful to any man. Do every good action in your power towards all men. In a word, love your neighbour as yourself: feel his happiness and misery, as your own: hold his character and rights equally sacred with your own: weigh his words and actions with that candour and equity, with which you expect he should treat yours.—These things will render your own character respectable and worthy; they will adorn your profession and honour your master. They will teach men the excellency of your choice and the goodness of your purpose, when you solemnly named

the name of Christ. Thus you will appear not in word only, but in truth and reality, a Christian.

SECTION III.

Thirdly, Be careful *to prevent, or soon to recover from the langour and declensions* in the ways of religion and virtue, into which too many sink after the most promising beginnings. The warmth of our passions in the early part of life, the fervour of our first resolutions, and the ardour which novelty on the entrance of a religious course will produce, will naturally cool and abate, when time has familiarized these objects and worn out these impressions. But the snares, against which pious prudence requires us to watch, are attended with a more malignant influence. The love of sensitive pleasures, the enticements of company. The expences of life, an indolence which steals upon the mind by imperceptible degrees, the hurries of business and the cares of the world, are far more pernicious than the natural abatement of our zeal; nay, hence this becomes so dangerous to the being of Religion in the soul. And when the principles, obligations and hopes of Religion affect us less than they used to do, the consequence is, the frequent and allowed omission of religious duties, whether of the private or social kind. Hence perhaps a general forgetfulness of God and the Redeemer and of divine objects will succeed to that delight, with which before the mind turned to and dwelt upon those objects. Hence the regularity and government of the thoughts will be lost: and injurious and malignant, or haughty and unfriendly words and speeches will be deemed matters of little moment. Hence the growing indifference to religious duties will spread itself to the Lord's Day, and the Lord's-table; and you will turn aside from the memorials of a dying friend. When this is the state of the mind, when the influence

influence of devotion subsides, and the flame of piety grows languid; when one part of our duty is performed with carelessness, and another part entirely neglected, will not the indifference and neglect extend to other things also? Will not our integrity be in some danger? Will not our benevolence and sobriety suffer? And does not the mind lie more exposed to the temptations that may betray it into some foul crime, some presumptuous sin; that may bring a suspicion on the sincerity of our former profession, and disgrace our names for ever? On the distant prospect of this perhaps your minds may start back with some degrees of horror and resentment; and you may be ready to say, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should indulge to these things?" But, alas, many, who would have expressed the same surprise and concern at the thoughts of thus falling away, have afterwards had reason to lament the weakness of their purpose. This should excite your humble care: humility and watchfulness are the most effectual means of securing our piety and virtue from these decays. Be then modest and circumspect. If you unhappily should hereafter be conscious to remissness and langour in the practice of Christian piety and virtue, pause when you feel the first stage of these declensions; speedily recover the ground that is lost; quickly return to the duties that have been neglected; resume the circumspection and care that have been remitted; and apply yourselves, with renewed vigour and more cautious diffidence, to the one thing needful. To prevent and cure these decays be mindful, first, of the purity and perfection of holiness, which is required of a Christian. Raise your eyes and fix your thoughts upon the rich and glorious prize, which demands all your attention and all your zeal. Recollect yourselves, and summon in the aid of every Religious consideration. The faithfulness and goodness of God abide the same through every age. The power and

grace

grace of the Redeemer are the same yesterday, to day, and for ever. The promises and blessings of the gospel are equally valuable and momentous now as they were yesterday, and will retain the same excellency and importance to-morrow. The claims of our heavenly Father and of our divine Saviour to our love and homage can never lessen; but grow more strong and binding every day. And you are candidates for an incorruptible crown, and an everlasting inheritance. Consider that every object, with which, as a Christian you are concerned, abides the same throughout all ages. Do they not then deserve and call for the same ardour, the same steady regard and the same constant attention? Cease not to seek them with the same full consent of the heart, till they vary and change. *Then* forget them, *then* indulge to a remissness about them; when *they* lose any degree of their intrinsic worth and value. Since this change will never take place as to them, suffer not a change or variation of your esteem for them, or of your diligence in the pursuit of them. For once more, if you check not the first symptoms and stop not the growing appearances of these declensions, whither will they tend? In what condition will they involve you? Attend to it. They will certainly end in the forfeiture of all your fair pretensions to the Christian Character, and in the loss of your Crown. And to all your pleasing hopes what will succeed, but a more aggravated misery and more distressing woe? Let this, if any consideration can, awaken your care, diligence, and zeal: and engage you.

SECTION IV.

Fourthly, To persevere and grow in all the affections and habits of pious virtue. "He that endureth to the end shall be saved." "Be thou faithful unto death," says the divine person, to whom you have devoted
your-

yourself, " and I will give thee a crown of life." Let your hearts then be fixed in the service of God, and let your whole life be sacred to his service. This steady attachment you have vowed, on this perseverance depends the glory and bliss of your future triumph. Here vigour and activity are requisite : you are to study and practise very important lessons : you are to exercise resignation under the greatest evils, meekness under the greatest injuries, and self-denial under every allurements to forbidden indulgences. Your duty is extensive : every circumstance is to feel the efficacy of your Christian principles, and every temptation is to be firmly resisted. The obligations of Religion reach through life : no condition can annul, or set aside the vows you have deliberately made : no situation can excuse from an unremitting concern to support the decorum and beauty of the character you have piously assumed. You may endeavour to forget the resolutions you have so piously declared and expressed ; but you cannot erase them from the retentive pages of the book of the divine remembrance, in which they are recorded. You have entered upon the most serious and important business, and are the professed candidates for the richest recompence the Lord and Judge of all can bestow. What instructions do these considerations convey and impress on the heart, but the necessity of diligence, unabated zeal, and perseverance to the end ? Remembering these things, so run that you may finally obtain the glorious and immortal crown. Persevere, and fix your Christian character : persevere, and possess the everlasting inheritance : never lose sight of this object. With your hearts and affections placed on it, aim at more than merely a rescue from Hell, and an abode in the regions of bliss : feel a nobler ambition, than merely to secure your salvation : soar with ardour after high degrees of bliss : seek a throne nearest to the throne of your Saviour ; seek a

crown,

crown, that will shine with distinguished lustre. Conscious to the power and energy of these views, let your works of Christian piety and virtue now shine forth with peculiar dignity and grace; wear all the beauties and exhibit all the charms of the Christian name. In plainer stile, and in the Apostolical language, be not only stedfast and immoveable, but always abound in the work of the Lord. Improve your time, your influence, your possessions for the Lord, and for the good of mankind. Study extensive usefulness: indulge yourself to devise liberal things. Learn to meet the different changes of life, the afflictions and injuries that may daily arise, with a more composed mind, with an entire resignation and more undisturbed meekness of spirit. See to it, that every malevolent and selfish principle dies and withers, by the growth and warmth of each generous and kind affection. Dwell more upon the thoughts of Heaven and Immortality. Raise your thoughts to things above, and grow more indifferent to the meaner concerns, and transitory interests of earth. Act like those, who know the degrees of future happiness depend on the degrees of their present goodness. Act as those, who remember the dignity of their birth and hope as Christians. Go on to conquer every difficulty, to mark every day with new improvements in piety and virtue, and to stamp every year with brighter characters of wisdom and goodness. Proceed in your Christian course glowing with this noble wish that your future glory may break forth not with the feeble lustre of the star, but may open and shine upon you with the brightness of the sun for ever and ever.

I have thus offered the advices and directions which are previous to a judicious and serious compliance with the Ordinance of Baptism, and which are suited

ed to render our submission to it useful in itself, and acceptable to God.

C O N C L U S I O N.

From the whole strain of the preceding discourse it is plain, that to promote Christian virtue and holiness is the ultimate design of Baptism. It's intention is to bind us more firmly to the practice of holiness, and to assist our pursuit of righteousness. A real love of pious virtue must lie at the foundation of our obedience to all positive institutions; and in forming the habits of holiness must center all our views of benefit and advantage from them. From a cool and repeated attention to the tendency of this sacred institution, and a persuasion of it's excellent practical influence, I would beg again to recommend, and intreat your serious and judicious compliance with it. This *one thing* I may, with the utmost reason, request, and I leave it to your judgement, how on any principle of reason or piety it can be refused: It is this, to take the matter into calm consideration, and to enquire, whether, in conscience and the fear of God, you think it a duty to be baptized into the name of Christ or not? And if it is a duty, whether in conscience and the fear of God, you do indeed think and believe, that your circumstances are such, as will excuse your neglect of it? Let my own conviction of its proceeding from God's all-binding authority, of its being the requirement of that venerable and kind person, who is our Redeemer, Lord and judge, and that nothing is little and trifling that hath any tendency to make us wise and good, let my conviction of these things, if any apology is needed, be my apology for placing the subject in so striking and interesting a light.

And now, sensible of the supreme importance of every instance of virtue and religion, nay of the folly and

and guilt of the most scrupulous obedience to the external duties of piety without holiness of heart and life, in the name of God and for the sake of Religion, as you would avoid the doom of hypocrites and their aggravated disappointment and woe, let me intreat you, whilst you neglect not the lesser matters of the law, not to slight and omit, Christians, the cardinal virtues and more indispensable obligations of justice, mercy, fidelity and the love of God. By every thing that is dear and sacred, whilst you do not leave the former undone, most highly value these things; prefer them to every other interest; and humbly and steadily practise them to the last moments of life. *Amen.*



F I N I S.
